

Submitter: Jim Schepcke
On Behalf Of: 350 Salem OR
Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment
Measure: SB488

Dear Chair Sollman and Committee Members:

On behalf of 350 Salem OR, the Salem chapter of the international organization working to end greenhouse gas emissions and build a world of community-led renewable energy for all, I want to voice our strong support of SB 488.

While we are most concerned about the fact that the Covanta Marion incinerator is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases in Marion County and one of the largest emitters in the state, we are equally concerned about the toxic chemicals that are produced from incineration that have been polluting our air and water for nearly four decades.

SB 488 is a common-sense bill that simply closes a loophole that has enabled the Covanta Marion incinerator to become the 4th largest medical waste incinerator in the U.S. according to data from the Energy Justice Network. Because Covanta Marion is regulated as a municipal waste incinerator and not a medical waste incinerator, it is able to exceed federal emissions standards for toxic chemicals like cadmium, hydrogen chloride, sulfur dioxide, mercury, lead, and carbon monoxide.

Burning medical waste is a lucrative business. Covanta Marion charges about six times what it charges for burning our municipal waste. Currently it is burning medical waste from throughout Oregon and from other states, and it is polluting the air and water not only in Marion County, but in Benton County where the toxic ash from the incinerator is being used as cover at the Coffin Butte landfill.

This is an environmental justice issue. The incinerator is located in a community just north of Salem that is primarily lower income people of color. There are schools and farms and orchards in the immediate vicinity of the incinerator. We can no longer ignore the harms that occur when children and families and seniors are exposed to the toxic emissions that result from burning medical waste — emissions that exceed federal standards.

It is time to close the loophole and force Covanta Marion to comply with federal emissions standards. There is no reason not to do this as a sensible public health measure.

Please support SB 488.

Jim Scheppke on behalf of 350 Salem OR