



**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Energy & Environment
on Senate Bill 488**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Findley, and Committee Members–

The Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonpartisan, environmental nonprofit that works at the nexus of human health and the environment. We would like to express our support for SB 488, which would require municipal solid waste incinerators, which accept specified amounts of medical or infectious waste, to meet federal emissions standards for a hospital, medical, or infectious waste incinerator. (Specifically, federal regulations define a large medical waste incinerator as one that can burn 500 pounds of medical waste per hour and a medium incinerator as one that can burn 200 pounds per hour.)

Incinerators are essential to waste disposal, capable of burning over 90% of total waste generated.¹ Medical waste incineration effectively destroys bacteria, pathogens and viruses, making it an important tool for waste disposal.² However, medical waste incinerators, which include both infectious medical waste and non-infectious general waste, can emit a substantial amount of pollutants.³ Metals, acid gasses, and carbon monoxide are a few of the pollutants that these incinerators release into the atmosphere.⁴

Medical waste also often includes plastics, like PVC, which results in the dangerous emission of toxics and chemicals into the air and environment.⁵

By requiring incinerators that burn specific amounts of medical or infectious waste to

¹ <https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/advantages-and-disadvantages-incineration.php>

² <https://bakerfurnace.com/content/benefits-medical-waste-incineration>

³ <https://www3.epa.gov/ttnchie1/ap42/ch02/final/c02s03.pdf>

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ <https://www.beyondtoxics.org/work/environmental-justice/air-quality/medical-waste-incineration-act/>



meet federal limits, the air quality of nearby residents will be impacted significantly. This change will most strongly improve the air quality of individuals surrounding the incinerator facilities, which are often low-income individuals or communities of color. Here in Oregon, that impacts Northeast Salem and Woodburn areas by the Covanta incinerator- communities that have a high amount of Hispanic and LatinX residents.

To be clear, we are advocating for more stringent pollution controls and updated technologies- and not the closure of a facility.

Covanta is currently estimated to be incinerating over 11,000 tons of medical waste per year. The technology for better pollution controls exists. This is also illustrated by our advocacy surrounding the Owens- Brockway glass plant in East Portland.⁶ In fact, 1 in 10 people in Oregon had current asthma in 2020.⁷ Reducing air pollution and improving air quality for Oregon residents is of the utmost importance- and would also address local environmental justice issues. This is what SB 488 seeks to achieve.

We urge the Senate Committee On Energy and Environment to support this bill.

Sincerely,

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<https://www.opb.org/article/2022/06/30/portland-glass-recycling-plant-owens-brockway-oregon-air-pollution-control-technology/>.

⁷ https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/most_recent_data_states.htm