

Submitter: Andrew Harris

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural
Resources

Measure: SB488

Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham and Members of the Committee,

As a resident of Salem for 37 years, and a physician with an interest in public health, I have long been concerned about the health consequences of toxic emissions from the Covanta Marion incinerator.

10 years after Covanta Marion went on line in 1987, the Environmental Protection Agency issued new regulations for medical waste incinerators, calling them “a major source of mercury and dioxin air emissions in the united States.” The incinerator burns 16,335 tons of medical waste (2022), making it the fourth-largest medical waste incinerator in the country, according to the nonprofit Energy Justice Network.

Emissions are tested just once a year, at a scheduled time and date, by a company hired by Covanta. This convenient relationship has allowed Covanta to burn less toxic (municipal) waste during the scheduled testing and to burn the waste at a constant temperature of about 1100 degrees Celsius. It is well established that dioxins are maximized when the incinerator is heating up or cooling down at temperatures between 200-450 degrees Celsius.

When medical waste that is high in polyvinyl chloride, is heated in an incinerator in the presence of paper products and other organic material, dioxins and furans are created, These are among the most toxic compounds on the planet, causing birth defects, cancer, autoimmune diseases, and infertility, as occurred with Agent Orange in the Vietnam War.

Medical waste also contains high percentages of heavy metals, such as cadmium, lead and mercury that cause birth defects, learning disabilities, lowered IQ, hyperactivity, attention deficit, violent behavior, and other neurologic disorders.

Imported medical waste from outside Oregon, including Washington, California, and Canada, now make up 91% of the medical waste burned at Covanta Marion, up 40% in just the past two years. Why has Oregon become a dumping ground for out of state medical waste? Because it is immensely profitable. The current tipping fee for Marion Co municipal waste is \$38.06/ton, compared to the tipping fee for out-of-state medical waste at \$550/per ton. That's over 14 times as much in profits for the owner, EQT Group, an international investment firm.

SB 488 as amended would require Covanta Marion emissions to be tested on an ongoing basis. Oregonians deserve to know what toxins are going up the stack and polluting the air we breathe, as well as our schoolyards, fields and streams. The Oregon legislature needs to give public health a high priority by passing SB 488.