



the campaign for
environmentally responsible
health care

NEWS RELEASE

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Also see:

Alternative Technologies Database

IRELAND TO TREAT MEDICAL WASTE WITH NON-BURN TECHNOLOGY NATIONWIDE

Dublin, Ireland - Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) today praised Ireland and Northern Ireland for its decision to treat medical waste nationwide with a steam-based, non-incineration technology.

"Ireland is on the front lines of the global movement to protect public health and the environment by using safer, non-burn technologies to treat medical waste," said Dr. Cestmir Hrdinka, co-ordinator of HCWH Europe.

The Joint Waste Management Board of Ireland recently awarded a 10-year contract to Sterile Technologies Ireland (STI) to dispose of nearly all the waste from public hospitals in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. STI will dispose of about 10,000 tons of medical waste per year, 95% of which will be sterilized with a steam-based system and buried in landfills. The remainder, which includes body parts and cytotoxic material, will be incinerated abroad.

Incinerators are a public health threat because they are a leading source of hazardous air pollutants, including dioxin, a known human carcinogen that has also been linked to birth defects and other health problems.

"We have all the evidence that incinerator emissions harm people and the environment. We appreciate that the board took this evidence seriously and decided to use a non-incineration technology," said Dr. Hrdinka. "The public also deserves praise because their outspoken opposition to incineration made this decision possible."

Non-incineration medical waste treatment technologies, such as steam-based systems, are safer and cleaner than incineration, do not produce dioxin, are just as effective at disinfecting medical waste, and are often more cost-effective.

"We urge other countries – such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which are currently reassessing their medical waste management plans – to follow Ireland's example and introduce non-burn technologies, instead of reconstructing and updating old incinerators," said Hrdinka, who is a member of a Czech Ministry of Environment working group that is preparing a medical waste management plan in the Czech Republic.

Ireland joins Slovenia, Portugal and the Philippines in committing to use safer non-burn technologies to treat medical waste nationwide.

Health Care Without Harm is an international coalition of 423 organizations in 51 countries working to reduce the environmental impact of the health care industry. For a list of hospitals using non-burn treatment technologies, see the Alternative Technologies Database at <http://www.noharm.org/alttech/search.cfm>