

Waste to energy (Incineration) -Replacing one bad idea with another by Trish Allen

I'm against a landfill in the Dome. The idea that the Hoteo River and Kaipara Harbour could be endangered by toxic leachate from a new landfill in the Dome Valley is unacceptable. At the same time, any suggestion that a waste-to-energy incinerator would solve the problem is simply replacing one bad idea with another. Instead, I would love to see us stand firmly against both the landfill and against incineration, and demand real zero waste solutions that enhance our environment and strengthen our community economically and socially.

Most of us in the community know why the proposed Dome landfill is a bad idea - traffic, environmental risks, and ongoing maintenance requirements. What we might not know is the multiple negative impacts of waste to energy plants, which is seeing many being decommissioned internationally. For example, the toxic ash that remains after burning still has to be disposed of in a landfill. This can be up to 25% of the original volume of waste material, but with more toxicity. So incinerators don't do away with the need for a landfill - instead they require a landfill for more toxic and dangerous waste.

Aside from the toxic ash, waste to energy incineration plants create an on-going demand for waste to fuel the incinerator, and at the same time destroy valuable resources by burning them. This doesn't make any sense. Our planet is finite and most environmental harm comes at the extraction stage – so why would we burn resources and get rid of them?

Our young people are calling for Climate Action now and we have a major responsibility to urgently reduce emissions. Incinerators create emissions. NZ's power is currently 80% clean (water, wind, geothermal) so why would we want to start burning rubbish to generate power? It just doesn't add up environmentally, economically or socially.

We don't have to embrace incineration because we oppose the landfill. We can instead embrace - and demand - zero waste. We need to get to a circular economy as soon as possible, to design products and materials that can be re-processed to keep the resources in the system, not destroy them by burning them and creating toxic residue. Materials recovery and recycling services create many more jobs than incinerators do, and add social benefit to our community. The life of the existing landfill at Redvale could be greatly prolonged if we were to substantially decrease the flow of material into it, buying us time to develop zero waste alternatives.

Waste incineration plants are expensive and once built, have to run for years to get a return, locking us into a destructive system. Right now our planet's ability to sustain life is seriously at risk. We cannot afford the luxury of investing in bad ideas.