

BEDFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM ENERGY FROM WASTE(EfW)

Public Meeting at Stewartby on 17 March

Peter Davis, Director of the British Plastics Federation, recommended to us by the Danish Embassy when we asked them for a speaker, presented an international perspective. He said that the UK lags behind Western Europe with only 23 EfW plants for a 60.5 million population. Denmark alone has 32 such plants for only 5 million people and gets 3.6% of its electricity and 18% of its total district heating from EfW. In W Europe as a whole the annual amount of energy generated from incineration is equivalent to the electricity demands of the Swiss. This is in the context of 3% (What is MSW?) of EU electricity production already coming from renewable sources. This could be increased by 5%, saving up to 14 million tonnes of oil every year, using just 10% of pre-sorted municipal waste. Recycling has continued to increase and waste has been diverted from landfill, where methane has 20x the impact on global warming than CO₂. Furthermore, in a survey of 97 European EfW plants, 87 reached a recovery efficiency rate of at least 50%. This conforms with Commission proposals and includes efficiency in supplying consumers. David provided a number of examples from Denmark, Sweden and Austria to illustrate how successfully EfW is operating, many at 80-90% efficiency levels.

The potential for impacts on health is very small. In the UK dioxin emissions from domestic heating are 19.4% of the total; iron and steel production contributes 13.1%; EfW plants = 0.8%. Road transport creates 44.5% of total UK NO_x emissions; EfW plants 0.2%. The 15 minute Millenium firework display in London equalled 120 years of dioxin emissions from the SELCHP(?) incinerator.

London has a recycling rate of 18%, a population of 7 million and landfills 72% of its waste, much of it in Bedfordshire. Essex landfills are closing and Sussex refuses to take any more from London. EfW in London accounts for only 9% of its waste. It has to be stressed that UK thinking has been conditioned by cheap and abundant landfill and energy, both of which are coming to an end. Unless we take urgent action, we may miss 2010 landfill diversion targets and thus incur heavy fines. At the moment we incinerate with energy recovery only 10% of municipal waste. The European average is 17.3%. The Government must provide stronger leadership by using the powers it has in the 2007 Energy and Waste White Papers, which strongly support EfW. It says it wants 25% of municipal waste to be dealt with as EfW by 2020. The proposed Planning Commission should speed up proposals but more publicity must be provided on the benefits of Energy from Waste, underlining points such as "A vigorous energy from waste policy is compatible with high recycling rates" and "Research carried out to date shows no credible evidence of adverse health outcomes for those living near incinerators" already made by Defra in its Waste Strategy for England, 2007. Above all, decision-making must be transparent, there must be active involvement and dialogue with everyone and an open door policy must operate, with time for community relations to be developed.