

Environmental advocates oppose waste-to-energy incinerators proposal

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MANILA - Environmental groups on Tuesday denounced moves in Congress to legalize garbage incineration, saying waste-to-energy plants are harmful to public health and environment.

Dr. Jorge Emmanuel, adjunct professor of environmental science and engineering at the Silliman University, said all incinerators release toxic materials.

Among the toxic substances that are emitted by waste-to-energy incinerators are carbon monoxide, which is associated with headache, dizziness and heart disease, and hydrogen chloride, which affects the lungs.

Emmanuel, in an online forum, said dioxin and furans are considered the worst toxic substances from the incinerators.

The effects of dioxins and furans include cancers such as leukemia and can also cause reproductive disorders for men.

For women, these toxins cause ovarian dysfunction and reduced fertility, he said. It can also cause birth defects and reduced learning ability among children.

Emmanuel said dioxins and furans remain in the environment for a long time.

"So whatever dioxins and furans are created today by putting in incinerators are going to remain in the environment for several generations," he added.

Emmanuel also noted the Philippines has limited capacity to monitor such toxic substances.

"At least 50 studies around the world confirm that people living within 2, 4, 5, 7.5 to 10 kilometers of incinerators have higher rates of leukemia, sarcoma, lymphoma, lung, pleural, stomach, liver, kidney, ovarian, colorectal, gall bladder and other cancers," he said.

"People who work in incinerator plants have higher cancer deaths."

Meanwhile, women living near incinerators of up to 4 kilometers during their pregnancy have higher miscarriages and birth defects, among others.

"Waste incinerators currently release an average 1 ton of carbon dioxide for every ton of waste incinerated," said Lee Bell, policy advisor for the International Pollution Elimination Network.

"Some 368 million tons of waste are incinerated globally per year equating to annual emissions of around 368 million tons of carbon dioxide."

Experts hope that by showing the effects of incineration, lawmakers will look into other solutions in dealing with waste at the local level that do not require burning. - **Report from Bettina Magsaysay, ABS-CBN News**

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