



South Africa Rejects Hazardous Waste Incineration

A coalition worked to stop construction of a hazardous waste incinerator in a poor township near Johannesburg.

In a victory for environmental justice, local environmental authorities in South Africa rejected a proposal to build one of the world's largest hazardous waste incinerators in a low income township near Johannesburg. Incinerators emit harmful amounts of dioxins and heavy metals that cause cancer and other illnesses.

In South Africa, like many places around the world, industries have generated thousands of barrels of liquid hazardous wastes. Companies in the United States and other Western countries generally employ alternatives to incineration for disposing of this waste. Over the last 20 years, public opposition has stopped all but one proposal for building new hazardous waste incinerators in the United States.

Despite the trend in the U.S. and Europe, in 1998, a South African company proposed to incinerate up to 1 million metric tons of liquid hazardous waste per year – more than half of the amount of hazardous waste incinerated per year in all of the U.S. The incinerator would have been located in the poor township of Sasolburg, about 60 miles southeast of Johannesburg. Sasolburg's population of 100,000 is plagued by nearly 50% unemployment.

A broad coalition of local, national and international NGOs, including the Sasolburg Environmental Committee, groundWork, Earthlife Africa, and the Global Anti-Incineration Alliance, banded together to oppose the incinerator. Serving as legal counsel for several of these groups, South African E-LAW advocate Patrick Pringle, of



the Legal Resources Centre (LRC), prepared a comprehensive legal and scientific evaluation detailing why local authorities in South Africa should reject the incinerator proposal.

At LRC's request, E-LAW U.S. provided information about recent U.S. EPA studies of the amounts of dioxins that incinerators emit, and U.S. EPA reports showing that the costs of adequately controlling toxic pollutant emissions from hazardous waste incinerators were many times more than the company claimed. LRC submitted this information to the South African government.

On October 2, 2002, the Free State Department of Environmental, Tourism and Economic Affairs rejected the proposed incinerator, citing local opposition and the company's failure to properly assess the health risks of incinerating hazardous waste in Sasolburg. E-LAW U.S. congratulates LRC and the coalition of environmental groups that worked to prevent this harmful practice of incinerating hazardous waste.

