

Summary Exercise

20%

The most commonly discussed alternative to landfills is something called a resource recovery facility. They don't just burn waste; they also recover energy. The energy is sold as steam to an industrial customer, or it is converted to electricity and sold to the local utility.

The new facilities are much cleaner than the municipal incinerators of old. Some, especially the larger and newer facilities, also come equipped with the latest in pollution-control devices.

The environmental community is uneasy with this new technology. Environmentalists have argued for many years that the best method of handling municipal trash is to recycle it.

More recently, opponents have found a stronger reason to oppose burning waste: dioxin in the plants' emissions which can be deadly, at least to animals, at very low levels.

What is Dioxin?

Dioxin is a generic term for any of 75 chemical compounds. The most infamous of these substances, 2,3,7,8-TCDD, is often referred to as the "most toxic chemical known." This judgment is based on animal test data.

The effects on humans are less certain. for many reasons: it is difficult to measure the amounts to which humans have been exposed and difficult to isolate the effects of dioxin from the effects of other toxic substances on the same population.

Virtually every incinerator tested since that date has shown traces of dioxin.

10-15%

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