

Neighbors protest easing limits on Hawkins Point incinerator: [FINAL Edition]

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ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Contending that their neighborhood would become the East Coast's trash bag, residents of Curtis Bay and Brooklyn came to a City Council committee hearing yesterday to fight a bill that would allow the Hawkins Point incinerator to burn waste from a wider area.

"What do you want, hearts and flowers?" a woman shouted. Phoenix officials said they need the bill to double their business from 65 tons to 125 tons daily so that they can turn a profit. If the bill passes, Phoenix will be permitted to collect medical waste from as far as 300 miles away.

The study also notes that the incinerator will initiate measures to bring the level of dioxins into the acceptable range. In addition to dioxins, the medical-waste incinerator produces pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide.

FULL TEXT

Contending that their neighborhood would become the East Coast's trash bag, residents of Curtis Bay and Brooklyn came to a City Council committee hearing yesterday to fight a bill that would allow the Hawkins Point incinerator to burn waste from a wider area.

But by the time the opponents got their chance to speak -- nearly four hours after the hearing began -- most had left.

"We fizzled out, but the hard core are here," said Sierra Club environmentalist Terry Harris.

At stake is whether the council should back a bill that would roll back statutes limiting the incinerator to receiving medical waste from a handful of Maryland counties as long as it stays within a daily 150-ton limit.

Phoenix Services Inc., which operates the Hawkins Point Medical Waste Incinerator in South Baltimore, wants to increase its reach because it is losing money.

Opponents responded with catcalls when company officials explained why they needed the bill.

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"Granting this facility the opportunity to compete and survive is a vote for the environment, not against it," Phoenix President Richard D. Montgomery said.

He warned that the company might not be able to continue to keep the incinerator operating at high standards if the council did not allow it to make a profit.

Representatives from area hospitals supported Phoenix. "Failure to pass {the bill} would be an enormous burden to hospitals," said George J. Moniodis, director of government affairs at St. Agnes HealthCare.

Opponents were unmoved. They said their neighborhoods would experience more pollution if the bill passed.

Medical-waste incinerators are a chief source of dioxin, considered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency a "probable" human carcinogen.

The Hawkins Point incinerator's dioxin emissions exceed standards that are likely to go into effect in July, according to the company's internal environmental impact study.

The study also notes that the incinerator will initiate measures to bring the level of dioxins into the acceptable range. In addition to dioxins, the medical-waste incinerator produces pollutants such as sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide.

Most of the 13 council members at last night's hearing did not favor the legislation.

"We are going to have to fight for votes," said 1st District Councilman Melvin L. Stukes, a chief supporter of the bill.

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