



# WasteWatch

A Newsletter by Chintan-Bharti Waste Resource Centre

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## Danger Looming Large in Delhi? Learn From Manila

Studies in India show that even a boiled egg from near an incinerator is contaminated with dioxins. What would be the fate of people, much higher in the food chain? To a large degree, studies from Europe are just as alarming. They point out that children born to people living near incinerators could have low birth weight and birth defects. This, along with other compelling evidence about incinerators, makes it hard to ever believe that this waste burning technology is safe or our health. Alongside this, there is also the problem of other burn technologies, such as RDF, or Refuse Derived Fuel, which could have a similar impact to that of incinerators. In short, RDF involves compacting waste for burning as fuel.

We need to be concerned about RDF because it's at our doorstep. The new draft Masterplan 2020 for Delhi says that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, MCD, will set up RDF plants to clean up the city and handle 2000-3000 tons of waste. The MCD concern for dealing the growing waste in Delhi is appreciable but applying poor technology does not solve the problem and will only aggravate the situation further.

As the common person, we are the most impacted of all. Tests have shown areas as far as 1,000 miles are impacted directly by the chemical particulates, metals, dioxin, products of incomplete combustion etc., from such technologies. As a result, not only would every resident of Delhi be exposed to the toxins, but many of our food sources that come from outside areas, will also be contaminated. In particular, fatty products that accumulate many toxics, such as dioxins, are particularly harmful. Even breast fed infants would be affected, as its by-products will also contaminate their mother's milk.



We don't have to go down this path. There is hope. One of the most successful government-led initiatives linked with these technologies has been the Clean Air Act of the Philippines. The government, with help from environmentalists, informed itself about the problems of incineration and burn technologies in general, and decided to prohibit these. Being like India, with congested slums and a hot, humid climate, increasing quantities of waste and a thriving waste-picking sector, the government got innovative and so did its citizens. Currently, there is a large citizens' led coalition that works on ecologically disposing of waste. The government also has a working body on the issue and there is a large awareness drive at all times. As a result, there is frenzied activity at the local ward level, called the Barangaya. Here, in small areas, there are active segregation and composting centres. The waste may come here through bins of door-to-door collection. The recyclable waste is given off for this purpose. Despite the rain, humidity and the sheer quantity of fish

waste, many Barangayas are adopting this idea rapidly. As a result, very little waste ever reaches the landfill. The Municipality does not have to think about RDF. In fact, the success of its Clean Air Act is based upon a viable, low cost alternative to waste burning of waste in any form.

If Delhi learned from Manila, we'd not only be healthier, but save substantial costs as well. The biggest cost in any such technology is the pollution control devices, which are over 50% of the total cost and difficult to operate. Besides, Delhi's waste is also not suited for producing energy as it has an average calorific value of about 800 cal / kg. For combustion technologies to succeed, they need about 2000 to 3000 cal / kg. Otherwise, auxiliary fuel has to be added. This makes the process even more uneconomical.

Maybe it's time for MCD to link up with a neighboring Asian country that's got a good thing going