

April 13, 1999

To: Healthcare Facilities in Oakland

Re: City of Oakland Dioxin Reduction Goals

Dear:

On February 2, 1999, the Oakland City Council adopted a Resolution that calls for the establishment of a regional task force to work on policy recommendations relative to dioxin, public health, and the environment. The Resolution calls for the City to work toward eliminating dioxin emissions wherever possible, including encouraging pollution prevention practices in all hospital and businesses that operate in the City. The City of San Francisco has recently adopted a similar resolution, and other cities and counties in the Bay Area are also considering resolutions. This letter is to urge your company to implement dioxin pollution prevention measures when managing medical waste.

One source of dioxin in the environment is the incineration of materials used by health care institutions that contain polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic. These materials include syringes, tubing, IV bags, endotracheal tubes, oxygen tents, and mattress covers. The City encourages your facility to use medical waste disposal alternatives, such as autoclaves or microwaves, which minimize the non-essential incineration of medical waste wherever possible and thus reduce dioxin emissions. In general, reducing the use of PVC plastic in medical facilities is important because PVC contributes dioxin to the environment during its manufacture as well as during its disposal if it is incinerated. A copy of the California Medical Association House of Delegates Resolution 103-98: PVC Plastic Use by Health Care Facilities, which was adopted in February 1998, is enclosed for your review.

Medical facilities can pursue a number of steps to reduce dioxin emissions. Enclosed for your use is a booklet from Health Care Without Harm that provides background material on environmentally responsible health care, and on pages 10-11, list the first nine steps facilities can take. The Alameda County Public Health Department is coordinating a local health care pollution prevention project that brings together government, community groups, environmental organizations, and the health care industry to work collaboratively on dioxin reduction and other types of pollution prevention. The City of Oakland invites you to join this effort in which we are also taking part. Pamela Evans, with the Environmental Health Division of Alameda County Public Health, is the lead for the project and is an excellent contact for information on how medical facilities can reduce dioxin emissions. Pamela can be reached at (510) 567-6770.

Staff from my office are working with community representatives and agency staff to establish a regional task force to recommend dioxin reduction policies. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on this important initiative and the steps your facility can take to reduce dioxin emissions.

Sincerely,

Brooke A. Levin
Environmental Services Manager

Enclosures