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Our ref: TO2021/01285/MP

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Dear Mo,

Thank you for your email of 13 January to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State raising concerns about waste incineration and health impacts. I have been asked to reply and I apologise for the delay in doing so. Defra is currently dealing with high volumes of correspondence due to COVID-19. Thank you for your understanding during this challenging time.

Pollution from industrial sources in England and Wales is controlled through the Environmental Permitting Regulations 2016 (EPR). The EPR requires industrial facilities to have an environmental permit and meet limits on allowable emissions in order to operate.

In England, all Energy from Waste (EfW) plants are regulated by the Environment Agency (EA) and must comply with the strict emission limits set by legislation. The EA assesses the emissions from new energy from waste plants as part of its permitting process and consults Public Health England (PHE) on every application it receives.

The EA will not issue an environmental permit if the proposed plant will have a significant impact on the environment or harm human health. Once operational, EfW plants are closely regulated through a programme of regular inspections and audits carried out by the EA, which also carefully checks the results of the continuous air emissions monitoring that all plants must do.

The Best Available Techniques conclusions for waste incineration were reviewed and updated in 2019, introducing new standards which will help deliver a reinforced level of environmental protection.

PHE has reviewed research undertaken to examine the suggested links between emissions from municipal waste incinerators and effects on health and PHE's risk assessment is that modern, well run and regulated municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health.

PHE's comments about the Medworth Energy from Waste facility are taken from the response to the scoping consultation, in which PHE provides advice and recommendations on what they expect to see addressed by applicants preparing an Environmental Statement (ES) as part of their Nationally Significant Infrastructure Planning (NSIP) submission.

In this instance, observations were made that any risks from electromagnetic fields (EMF) have not been addressed in the scoping consultation, but this does not mean there is a risk from EMF at the site. As the planning process progresses, it is usual for more detailed information and assessments to be provided, accepting that any assessments undertaken to inform the ES should be proportionate to the potential impacts of the proposal.

The Government's ambition for the future of waste management in England is to ensure that we preserve material resources through a reduction in the generation of waste and moving towards a circular economy. We also want to manage any residual waste in a way that maximises its value as a resource whilst minimising environmental impacts. The Resources and Waste Strategy, published in 2018, sets out how we will minimise the damage caused to our natural environment by reducing and managing waste safely and carefully. You can view the Strategy here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-and-waste-strategy-for-england>

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State about this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Plowright  
Ministerial Contact Unit