



VETERINARY IRELAND VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

POLICY STATEMENT ON VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS RELATING TO LANDFILL AND WASTE THERMAL DESTRUCTION SITES.

The use of landfill and thermal destruction sites for disposal / treatment of waste could potentially pose a health risk to local and distant human and animal populations but this risk may be avoided by biochemical, microbiological and toxicological monitoring of water, air, soil, vegetation, and effective bio-security and site management can be implemented. The surveillance of animals in the vicinity of such sites can offer additional valuable information in these regards.

However, there are also many alleged health risks associated with the use of incinerators and landfill sites, which cause public concern. Investigations of increased morbidity and mortality in humans and animals as a result of alleged environmental contamination may be controversial. Incontrovertible proof of cause and effect in these circumstances may be difficult to establish. The potential for bioaccumulation of chemicals / toxins in animal and human tissues and the latency period between exposure and possible side effects should be considered.

It is this Committee's contention that the use of animal surveillance systems to establish baseline data on animal health and productivity (including harvesting and storage of tissues) can provide scientific data to reassure the authorities and the public and may counter misinformation. Multidisciplinary animal health surveillance systems can allow for rapid access to reliable information in the event of industrial accidents or allegations of environmental / foodchain contamination.

An example of the benefits of this concept was demonstrated recently when 11 years of stored milk samples (1991-2001) from County Cork were sent to Germany for dioxin analysis (dioxin is concentrated in milk). The results recorded a 60% decline in the level of dioxin over the ten-year period. (FSAI News Vol. 4, Issue 4, July 2002)

7 July 2003

