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By email

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Our ref: 28/02/lh/918

27 March 2018

Dear Bedfordshire Against Covanta Incinerator

Re: Health Impacts and Waste Incinerators - full documentation and reports relating to delayed investigation

Thank you for your email dated 28 February 2018. Your request for information has been handled under the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR).

You asked:

Please provide all documentation and reports relating to the delayed investigation by the PHE into the health impacts of waste incinerators (including Energy from Waste Plants).

We understand that this investigation was first announced some years ago and only a small part of the investigation has been published - which we have access to - so far. This is the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU) article "Estimating Particulate Exposure from Modern Municipal Waste Incinerators in Great Britain"

Please provide all other documentation/reports/statistics/papers/conclusions etc, that relate to the wider investigation

As part of the funding process for this project through the Centre for Health Protection Research CHPR, reports were submitted during the time of the funding (1st April 2010-31st March 2014) to report on progress of the project in that time. These reports have been redacted to remove:

- personal information, in accordance with the Regulation 13 of EIR

- details of the contract price and payment schedule in accordance with the confidentiality of commercial or industrial information (regulation 12(5)(e))

In order to determine whether the above exception is sufficiently engaged PHE must assess the public interest considerations.

Factors which were considered In favour of release include:

- the public interest in transparency and the desire of PHE to be open and transparent;
- disclosing information to present a full picture

Factors supporting maintaining the exception include:

- releasing the costs would prejudice future commercial bidding to the disadvantage of Public Health England

I conclude that taking these factors into account, the public interest is maintained by engaging the exception and not releasing at this time the information you have specified.

The study is ongoing but interim papers including the one you cite have been published. These are:

- The latest paper estimating exposure from municipal waste incinerators, which you state you already have access to:
<http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/acs.est.6b06478>
- A lay protocol, which details what is included in the study is available here:
<http://www.sahsu.org/content/incinerators-study>
- An earlier paper comparing two exposure assessment methods is available here: <http://www.hindawi.com/journals/jeph/2013/560342/>
- A paper about metal emissions from incinerators is here:
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1352231015300753>
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These papers are not attached as this would infringe copyright, but the articles can either be obtained online by purchasing through the publisher's website, though they may be available as open access, or by ordering through your local public library, for which there may be a charge.

Researchers at Imperial College London and King's College London have periodically presented interim posters on the methodology for the study at UK and international scientific conferences. Where PHE holds the final versions of such posters, these are attached.

It was originally envisaged that preliminary results for this study would be available by March 2014 but because of the unanticipated complexity in gathering data this was delayed. Some of the data on emissions from municipal waste incinerators were unexpectedly held in paper format rather than in electronic files, and had to be entered manually onto a computer before the analysis could begin. There was a delay while this process took place. Additional delays have been encountered in getting access to all the health data as this has had to be sourced from a number of different organisations, and also agreements needed to be put in place to link the data between the different sources.

It is expected that papers from the project will be submitted by SAHSU to peer reviewed journals in spring 2018, and it is likely to be a few months after submission for the papers to be published.

Your request for information is too broad in scope and our initial searches indicate that to determine whether we hold the information, retrieve and extract information to respond to your request as it stands would exceed the cost limit of £600. The cost limit is calculated at a staff rate time at £25 per person per hour working for 24 hours to respond to the request. Therefore, I have narrowed the scope of your request and not included other administrative documentation held on the study. PHE does not hold any information other than what is enclosed pertaining to the methodology or findings of the study.

It is important to stress that PHE's position that well run and regulated modern municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health remains valid, and the study is being carried out to extend the evidence base and to provide further information to the public on this subject.

If you have any queries regarding the information that has been supplied to you, please refer your query to me in writing in the first instance. If you remain dissatisfied and would like to request an internal review, then please contact us at the address above or by emailing foi@phe.gov.uk

Please note that you have the right to an independent review by the Information Commissioner's Office if a complaint cannot be resolved through the PHE complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner's Office can be contacted by writing to Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF.

Yours sincerely

FOI team