

**Resolution: That the company (AIAL) commit to cease incineration of all quarantine waste within 12 months and change to steam sterilisation.**

Auckland International Airport is an important gateway to New Zealand operated by Auckland International Airport Ltd (the company). The company's reputation is linked to that of New Zealand – clean, green, progressive and environmentally friendly.

The airport generates quarantine waste, that the company is obliged to treat under the Biosecurity Act and its aerodrome licence. Quarantine waste is currently treated through incineration facilities operated by the joint venture company Waste Resources Ltd. Waste Resources Ltd is jointly owned by the Auckland International Airport Ltd and Tredi (NZ) Ltd.

Incineration, through discharges to the air and waste ash, is known to be a major contributor of dioxins into the environment around the world. Dioxins are some of the most deadly pollutants known. Once discharged into the environment, dioxins may remain in the human body and be passed to future generations.

Steam sterilisation is regarded as a clean, viable and cost-effective alternative to incineration that does not generate dioxins. A New Zealand government report states: *“Total installed costs for autoclave [steam steriliser] systems are less or equal to those of new waste incinerators. Operating costs for autoclave systems are also likely to be similar to those for incinerators<sup>i</sup>.”*

The company is already committed through its values statement<sup>ii</sup> to *“Operating in a manner that*

*minimises impact on our local community and physical environs”, and within the commitments statement<sup>iii</sup>, to “Engaging in sound practices respecting others and accepting responsibility for our behaviours.”*

We urge the company to make a commitment to cease incineration of all quarantine waste within 12 months and change to steam sterilisation.

### **Background**

Dioxins are some of the most toxic chemicals known to science, causing cancer, birth defects, diabetes and interference with hormone and immune systems. There is no safe level of dioxins. In recognition of the need to protect public health and the environment, the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants aims to eliminate dioxins. New Zealand is a signatory to this Convention and, as such, is legally obligated to pursue the Convention's ultimate goal of eliminating dioxins. New Zealand will achieve this goal only by abolishing sources of dioxins, such as the Waste Resources incinerator.

The incinerator has been breaching its resource consent conditions (under the Resource Management Act) on dioxin release for over two years. Dioxins have been measured in the incinerator's stack gases at over 17 times the legally permitted levels. More thorough monitoring of stack gases, ashes and scrubber residues could mean that the incinerator may be the

largest single dioxin source in New Zealand.

Dioxin formation can be avoided and regulatory requirements for the treatment of quarantine waste can be met by cleaner treatment technologies such as steam sterilisation. Two non-incineration treatment facilities for quarantine and medical waste have recently been established in Wellington and Auckland.

The MAF Biosecurity Authority Facility and Operator Standard PBC-NZ-STD-FACIL-REFUSE specifies steam sterilisation as an approved method for the destruction of quarantine waste.

In addition to being dioxin sources, incinerators also generate and/or release hundreds if not thousands of other pollutants, many of which are not yet identified and have unknown consequences. As more of these pollutants are identified and their effects determined, they too will come under national and international regulations so that owner/operators of incinerators, such as AIAL, will be forced to invest in increasingly costly pollution control equipment, as well as more stringent treatment of ash and other residues.

The incinerator is reported as being at the end of its life and as a result of its age and design may not be able to be upgraded to reach current, much less future environmental standards. While interim measures, such as installation of a heat exchange unit, *may* bring the emissions within those stated in the resource consent, this cannot be viewed as a long-term solution. Reports on the Auckland Regional Council file (number 9007:8072) indicate sub-optimal performance, with potential health and safety risks to workers.

The health and environmental impacts of incineration could create future liabilities for AIAL and its shareholders. International perspectives on the responsibilities of corporations are changing and companies are increasingly expected to be held accountable financially and morally for their actions. This future liability is unquantifiable but is likely to be significant.

Due to the serious nature of the threat to the environment and the health of local communities and the wider public, and the ongoing unlawful operation of the incinerator, AIAL should make an immediate commitment to change to steam sterilisation within 12 months.

For further information on options available please see  
**[www.greenpeace.org.nz/aial](http://www.greenpeace.org.nz/aial)**

<sup>i</sup> The Cost-Effectiveness of Reductions in Dioxin Emissions to Air from Selected Sources Economic Analysis for Section 32 of the Resource Management Act-A report prepared for the Ministry for the Environment, Janice C. Wright, Independent Policy Analyst, Philip Millichamp, Sinclair Knight Merz and Simon J. Buckland, Ministry for the Environment, August 2001

<sup>ii</sup> AIAL annual report Vision statement

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*