

Greater London Authority's ongoing 17-year failure to act with due diligence over link between exposure to Incinerator emissions and infant mortality

by Michael Ryan BSc, C Eng, MICE

The Greater London Authority might have avoided the above had the Environment Agency (EA) acted with due diligence after Alan Dalton, their Regional Director for the North East became concerned at the EA's disregard for health concerns of residents near landfill sites and incinerators.

In August 2001, Alan Dalton sent a report: "Just who does the Environment Agency protect?" to Environment Minister Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP asking him to either "back him or sack him. Michael Meacher sacked Alan Dalton by fax on 19 December 2001 and Alan Dalton's faxed reply that day told him that "he'd shot the messenger".

"As the environment agency meets for its annual meeting today, it is embroiled in a public row with one member of its 15-strong board who has issued a "back me or sack me" ultimatum to the environment minister, Michael Meacher. Alan Dalton says his attempts to fulfill his brief of improving the agency's protection of the public have been obstructed."

(Burning issues, by Paul Brown, Guardian, 12 September 2001)

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2001/sep/12/guardiansocietysupplement10>

One of the case studies in the above report was for the Byker incinerator:

<https://www.chroniclive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/gagging-orders-stopped-ash-probe-1673847>

In denial on waste

SIR – I remember meeting Lesley McCarthy (Letters, Sept 5) at Cardiff station when Alan Dalton arrived for the Nantygwyddon Hazardous Waste Tip debate at the Welsh Assembly in January 2003.

Alan Dalton had been appointed a board member of the Environment Agency (EA) by Environment Minister Michael Meacher and he was shocked at the way the EA brushed aside the health concerns of residents over exposure to landfill sites and incinerators as reported by Paul Brown, in The Guardian of September 12, 2001. It will be 10 years in December 2013 since Alan Dalton died and it seems as if the UK is still in denial over adverse health effects from landfill sites and incinerators.

Alan Dalton's obituary (The Guardian, December 16, 2003) had the following: "Dalton was appointed to the board of Britain's biggest quango, with its 10,500 workforce, in January 1999 by Meacher to inject new thinking, but says he has failed and attacks a 'culture of secrecy and defensiveness'. He says the agency has lost its way in its role of cutting air, water and ground pollution."

What kind of a country is this where we'll be forcing children to study maths and English until they reach a reasonable pass rate, whilst failing to protect the health of existing and future generations?

Michael Ryan

Bicton Heath, Shrewsbury

(Western Mail, 10 September 2013)

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/incoming/comment--debatewestern-mail-letters-5873304>
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/dec/16/guardianobituaries>

In September 2006, I purchased a three-year set (2003-2005) of Vital Statistics 4 data for all electoral wards in England & Wales from ONS. After aggregating the infant mortality rates

for the above three years I was confident in finding higher rates of infant mortality in electoral wards exposed to PM2.5 emissions from incinerators and other industrial sources as I'd already studied a six-year set (1998-2003) for all wards in Shropshire and seen elevated rates downwind of Ironbridge Power Station.

Having mapped the 2003-2005 infant mortality rates in all 625 electoral wards in Greater London (City of London counted as a single ward) and seen higher rates around Edmonton incinerator, I emailed Ken Livingstone and Assembly Members on 6 November 2006. You can read how the matter was considered "not urgent" and dismissed here:

Other bodies, such as the London Health Authority (LHO), Environment Agency (EA), and the Health Protection Agency (HPA) could have been consulted, especially the LHO as their website had the infant mortality rates for all London wards aggregated for the three years 2003-2005.

On 12 April 2007, BBC Radio London sent a journalist to interview me in Shrewsbury about the incinerator link with infant mortality. During the taped interview, I was asked if I thought that I was the first person to see the link between incinerators and infant mortality. I replied that I was sure that I wasn't, but that I was probably the first to get it into the public domain.

She later emailed the LHO and was told that their expert advisers had told them that air pollution wasn't linked to infant mortality. After the BBC dropped the news item about my research, I contacted the LHO and obtained copies of the above email correspondence. I then made a request under the Freedom of Information Act asking for the names of their expert advisers and their written reply claimed that they couldn't remember.

The first newspaper reports about this research were in six local London papers and one national in 2007. VS4 data listed numbers of births and deaths in every electoral ward in England and Wales, both as totals and by sex. The deaths were also listed in age groups: under 28 days, less than 1 year, 1-4, 5-14, 15-24 years etc.

The Waltham Forest Guardian article of 2 August 2007 is still online:

[http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/1592749.concerns over infant death rates in chingford green/](http://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/1592749.concerns%20over%20infant%20death%20rates%20in%20chingford%20green/)

Burner fear for children

25th May 2007

By Simon Barrett

Share

An anti-incinerator campaigner says he has uncovered further evidence which suggests the controversial Newhaven plant could lead to a sharp rise in infant mortality and birth defects.

Researcher Michael Ryan has collated figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and primary care trusts, data on birth defects and infant mortality to ascertain where the highest incidences were taking place. Shropshire-based Mr Ryan concluded that those families living near incinerators had suffered disproportionately high levels of both.

Mr Ryan's claims follow yesterday's story on the Newhaven incinerator in The Argus. Retired GP Dr Dick van Steenis claimed the plant could create a "fall-out zone" which could shorten people's lives by up to 12 years.

Mr Ryan said: "I'm appalled birth defect data has been collected on government instruction since January 1964, yet nobody appears to have analysed it to identify avoidable environmental causes.

"The figures prove wards in which people live downwind of incinerators have much higher infant mortality rates, regardless of other social impacts such as poverty levels.

"It's as though teams of civil servants at ONS and the Department of Health have been asleep on the job for more than 40 years. It's a worse public health scandal than the thalidomide one that led to the collection of birth defect data in the first place."

Figures obtained by Mr Ryan showed one in every 16 babies born in rural mid Devon in 2002, an area with an incinerator, had at least one defect.

This compared with fewer than one in 630 babies born in London's traffic-clogged Islington during the same year.

Meanwhile, Enfield in north London has Britain's largest incinerator at Edmonton. The death rate for babies up to one year old in the west of the borough is virtually nil.

But in eastern Enfield, which sits downwind of the incinerator and is exposed to smoke from the chimney, the death rate is between 10 and 12 per thousand.

The national average death rate for babies up to a year old is 5.2 per thousand.

Mr Ryan said the most damaging emissions, tiny harmful particles known as PM 2.5s, are not measured by the authorities.

He added that while incinerator filters take out 99 per cent of particles, it is the ultra fine one per cent, the PM 2.5s, that can have chronic effects on health.

East Sussex County Council approved plans for the incinerator earlier this year. The Government decided not to call in the application, despite protesters fighting a long-running campaign that led to almost 15,000 written objections. It is due to open in 2010.

In The Argus yesterday, Dr Steenis argued tens of thousands of people living in a 15- mile radius of the incinerator would suffer, including those in Brighton and Hove, Lewes and Eastbourne.

Veolia Environmental Services, the company behind the incinerator, said his comments were at odds with the findings of the Health Protection Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

A spokesman said: "We would like to assure people the proposed energy recovery facility in Newhaven, which will generate electricity from black bag' household waste, that otherwise would be landfilled, is safe. The Environment Agency has granted the facility a pollution prevention and control permit and stated this facility does not cause a threat to the environment or human health'."

<https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/1427370.burner-fear-for-children/>

Infant Mortality: Incinerators

Volume 463: debated on Monday 17 September 2007

[Norman Baker](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the correlation between the presence of a functioning incinerator and the incidence of infant mortality in that area. (155374)

[Mr. Bradshaw](#)

In November 2005 the Health Protection Agency issued advice on the public health impact of Municipal Solid Waste Incineration and this is available on their website at:

www.hpa.org.uk/chemicals/ippc/incineration_posn_statement.pdf.

This information has also been placed in the Library.

Emissions from modern waste incinerators in the United Kingdom are subject to stringent health controls.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2007-09-17/debates/0709175000014/InfantMortalityIncinerators>

The following London map used the same 2003-2005 infant mortality rates referred to in my email of 6 November 2006. The unexpectedly low rates of infant deaths in the L4 group of

electoral wards downwind of the Colnbrook incinerator are due to planes to and from Heathrow causing the displacement and dispersal of emissions from that incinerator. I was puzzled by high infant death wards in group H7 until the Environment Agency kindly sent me a list of hazardous waste incinerators that included Reichhold’s incinerator in Cricket Green ward, London Borough of Merton.

<http://www.ukhr.eu/mapa4.pdf>

London’s electoral wards were unchanged for the twelve years 2002-2013 and after aggregating the infant mortality rates for those years, I looked at “groups of four” wards, i.e. any four wards that formed a single group, to see which groups had the highest and lowest average infant death rate. The following two tables are from page 8 of my November 2017 submission to the EFRA committee:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environment-food-and-rural-affairs-committee/joint-inquiry-into-improving-air-quality/written/73685.pdf>

These four wards clustered around the Edmonton incinerator had a higher infant death rate than any other group of four wards in London:

Borough	Ward	Live births	Infant deaths 2002-2013 ONS data	Infant deaths per 1,000 live births
Enfield	Lower Edmonton	3738	36	9.6
Enfield	Upper Edmonton	3827	36	9.4
Waltham Forest	Valley	1834	16	8.7
Haringey	White Hart Lane	2710	23	8.5
	Totals	12109	111	9.2

The four Bromley wards below, which had very low infant death rates during the same 12 years, also form a single group - but are relatively free from incinerator emissions:

Borough	Ward	Live births	Infant deaths 2002-2013 ONS data	Infant deaths per 1,000 live births
Bromley LB	Darwin	589	0	0
Bromley LB	Shortlands	1034	0	0
Bromley LB	Hayes and Coney Hall	1652	2	1.2
Bromley LB	Kelsey and Eden Park	1844	1	0.5
	Totals	5119	3	0.6

Green Party Assembly Member Darren Johnson asked these questions in May 2010:

Incinerators

Question No: 41 / 2010

Darren Johnson

A constituent asks, is there any evidence to suggest that the SELCHP and Kings College Hospital incinerators which flank Southwark contributed to the Borough having the highest infant mortality rate in London in 2008?

Infant morality (sic) rates

Question No: 42 / 2010

Darren Johnson

Will you publish electoral ward-level data and a map showing the 2002-2008 infant mortality rates in London?

“Please provide pdf of the infant mortality report that followed questions by Darren Johnson AM in 2010”

https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/please_provide_pdf_of_the_infant#incoming-1406852

The Greater London Authority later claimed in 2009 (see above FoI request) to have no knowledge of the subsequent report which can be seen here.

Note that there are no incinerators marked on the map on page 8 and also that the authors wrongly claimed on pages 4 & 5 that Newham had the highest infant death rate in 2002-2008, whilst the table on page 2 of the report correctly shows that Southwark had the highest rate at 7.2 per 1,000 live births.

“Therefore we would expect areas with higher levels of child poverty and have a high IMD rank to have higher levels of infant mortality and visa versa. These relationships can be seen in London. For example, Newham had the highest infant mortality rate (6.5) of all London boroughs and was also the third most deprived London borough and had the fourth highest proportion of children living in income deprivation (0.52).”

If the above statement is correct for Newham Borough, “the poor” must have been leaving in droves prior to SELCHP incinerator starting in 1993 and then there must have been a sudden post-incinerator influx of poor people to “explain” why there was a sudden increase in Newham’s infant death rate.

<http://ukhr.eu/incineration/selchp.htm>

The above graph was the first of over thirty graphs I’ve prepared showing a post-incinerator rise in infant mortality rates in Councils exposed to emissions and this Liverpool Echo letter explains more about the above SELCHP graph:

“SUGGESTING that incinerator emissions don't harm health is very easy (Liverpool Echo, 25 January 2014).

But providing evidence of "lack of harm" has so far eluded the Environment Agency, Health Protection Agency and also Veolia's legal team at the Shrewsbury incinerator public inquiry in 2011, where Dr Dick van Steenis was my expert witness.

Infant mortality rates are accurate indicators of the health of a community and a rapid fall in rates in [England and Wales](#) followed the switch to the cleaner North Sea Gas- but no causal link was apparently made between the two events.

In December 2012 the Office for National Statistics kindly released the 1970-2010 infant mortality rates for all London boroughs and I doubt if any of the above can offer any explanation, other than changing levels of airborne pollution, for the similar, falling rates in the boroughs of Wandsworth, Lewisham, Newham and Tower Hamlets prior to the start-up of the [SELCHP \(South East London Combined Heat and Power\)](#) incinerator in 1993 and the sudden rise in rates in the three boroughs most exposed to emissions from SELCHP, while the rate in 'upwind' Wandsworth continued to fall.

Michael Ryan, Shrewsbury”

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Harm+is+hard+to+prove%3B+You+Say+Email%3Aletters@li verpoolecho.co.uk.-a0357065225>

This letter explains more about how the former Health Protection Agency failed to act with due diligence over the incinerator issue:

“Incinerator deaths study was misleading

'The enormous incinerator that controversially looms over the M5 in rural Gloucestershire' (Western Daily Press, May 25) will be seen by many who also live within range of an incinerator and who have also been told that incinerator emissions cause no health damage, by experts unable to provide supporting evidence.

Having read about the then newly-formed Health Protection Agency being aware of "public concern about ill health consequences of long-term exposure to chemicals, such as those emitted from landfills, incinerators and industrial sites" ('Chemical danger testing', Western Daily Press, August 6, 2003), I used FoI in March 2008 to ask the HPA for a list of incinerators around which they'd examined the rates of illness and rates of premature deaths at all ages at electoral ward level and compared upwind wards with those downwind of incinerators .

Justin McCracken, the second CEO of the HPA, had the brass neck to confirm in May 2008 that they'd not checked any such data around any incinerator, whilst in that same month his claim to be "proud to put public health first" was reported in Nigel Hawkes' interview (The Times, May 20, 2008), which included: "Our role is to develop evidence and make sure that those who can act on it are given it and do act on it".

After a series of critical articles by Mark Metcalf in Big Issue in the North, the HPA promised a study into a possible link between incinerator emissions and infant mortality in 2011, which was carried out by SAHSU and published over seven years later. After adjusting ONS infant mortality data for deprivation, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, the authors concluded that there was no risk.

For the SAHSU rationale to hold, there'd have to have been major population shifts before and after incinerators started operating, with "the poor etc" leaving prior to the start-up to "explain" the then falling infant death rates and sudden returns after incinerators started operating to account for the rise in rates of baby deaths. These very location-specific and time-critical population shifts just didn't occur at council level, which SAHSU and other experts should have realised before submitting a flawed and misleading study for publication.

Michael Ryan

Shrewsbury”

(Western Daily Press, 1 June 2019, pages 26 & 27)

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/243962/Are-rubbish-incinerators-killing-our-children>

<https://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/9079433.waste-incinerators-inquiry-into-link-with-infant-deaths/>

<https://www.enfieldindependent.co.uk/news/9077282.public-health-effect-of-edmonton-incinerator-could-be-part-of-new-study/>

<https://www.irvinetimes.com/news/23444782.irvine-incinerator-plans-opposition-growing-oldhall-waste-plant/>

<https://www.newsandstar.co.uk/news/23470145.concerns-infant-mortality-rates-waste-incinerators/>

<https://londonnewsonline.co.uk/campaigners-claim-residents-living-near-incinerators-being-used-as-guinea-pigs/>

**Do waste incinerators kill infants?
Podcast by Michael Ryan**

<https://markwritecouk.files.wordpress.com/2022/01/waste-incinerators.mp3>

Michael Ryan of Shrewsbury began examining the health record of incinerators after he considered that the loss of two of his children could have been the result of having lived downwind of an incinerator.

<https://markwrite.co.uk/do-waste-incinerators-kill-infants/>

In this podcast he puts the case that after incinerators start operating that infant death rates rise in locations exposed to emissions. He feels well-placed to do so due to personal circumstances and extensive research over the last two decades.

I have worked since 2009 with Michael on a series of *Big Issue North* articles and which can be read

<https://markwrite.co.uk/incinerator-study/>

“Health Risk by Julia Lewis

Families living downwind of incinerators are more at risk from infant death, heart disease, cancer and autism, health researchers claim. Michael Ryan and Dr Dick van Steenis believe babies are more likely to die if they are exposed to fumes from incinerators like the South East London Combined Heat and Power Plant (SELCHPP) in Deptford.

The researchers point to Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures showing infant mortality rates ward by ward. Areas downwind of the incinerator in Landmann Way have an infant mortality rate more than four times that of wards upwind of the plant. ONS figures show that, in wards north-east of SELCHPP, infant deaths are 7.1 per 1,000 compared with 0.9 per 1,000 south of the plant.

Findings

They maintain research carried out in the US backs up their findings but that the Government won’t listen to them. Because of the prevailing westerly wind, they claim, areas to the north-east of an incinerator are most affected by dangerous emissions that contain PM2.5 particles – a cocktail of heavy metals small they can be breathed in.

Dr Van Steenis, a retired GP and once adviser to a House of Commons air pollution select committee, said: “There is nothing to screen out PM2.5 particles in the UK and there is no regulation.”

Dr Frederica Perera, professor at New York’s Columbia University and director of Columbia Centre for Children’s Environmental Health, said: “Many studies, including our own, have found that in utero or childhood exposures to PM2.5 particles, or pollutants in the particles, are associated with adverse respiratory health and neuro development in children, and may increase the risk of cancers later on in life. But Chris Smith, of the Government’s Environmental Protection Directorate, said no permit would be issued to an incinerator operator if a health risk was likely. Emissions were tightly controlled under EU limits and incinerators regulated. A spokesman for Environmental Services Association, which represents the waste management industry, said incinerators had to operate to “extremely high” standards.

(South London Press, 4 May 2007)

*****End*****