

PORTLAND

COMMUNITY
NEWS AND
FEATURES

Oregon DEQ curbs support of incinerator plan

Approval to build plant
in NE Portland termed
'premature' by official

By DIANE DULKEN

Correspondent, The Oregonian

The state Department of Environmental Quality has qualified its support of a proposed incinerator in Northeast Portland after learning of possible limitations on the burner equipment, issued by the manufacturer.

A recommendation that the incinerator be built was "premature," one DEQ official said in light of the new concerns.

Questions about the incinerator were raised at a hearing on whether to grant an air quality discharge permit to Ko-Am International Co. Ltd., a Portland firm.

Ko-Am wants to build the incinerator at 7559 N.E. 33rd Ave. to burn transformer cores and recover the copper inside. Some of the

transformers would contain low levels of polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, a toxic compound that was used widely as an insulator until 1979, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned their manufacture.

At a crowded hearing Tuesday night in Whitaker Middle School, opponents of the project presented a warranty by the manufacturer of the incinerator that specifically warns against using the equipment to burn PCBs, which have been linked to skin disease, kidney ailments, birth defects and cancer in laboratory animals.

According to the warranty given by the manufacturer, Al-Jon/United Inc., a Topeka, Kans., company, "polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), lead asbestos or toxic materials of any kind shall not" be burned because the materials "may be detrimental to human, animal and plant life."

On Wednesday, Wendy Sims, a manager with the Air Quality Division of DEQ, said that she believed the intent of the warranty language was to protect the manufacturer

against liability and "does not reflect on the ability of the incinerator to burn the materials."

However, faced with the new argument against the burner, Nick Nikkila, administrator of the DEQ's air quality division, said Tuesday night, "There are a lot of questions being asked. We're not going to make a determination until we get the answers to these questions."

He also said the recommendation by a DEQ air quality engineer to grant the permit was "premature."

The hearing will be continued, but not for at least two weeks.

According to DEQ's evaluation of the project, up to 4.8 pounds of PCBs would enter the incinerator each year and 99 percent of the compound would be destroyed by the burner's high temperatures, which would reach 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit.

Representatives of Ko-Am did not return calls Wednesday. However, an attorney for Ko-Am said Tuesday night that the incinera-

tor was the same type of burner legally being used elsewhere in the country to burn material contaminated with PCBs.

"There's something that doesn't make sense," said attorney John Brooke in referring to the language of the warranty.

A receptionist for Al-Jon/United in Topeka said that company officials were not available for comment and were away for the rest of this week.

About 120 people, almost unanimous in their opposition to the proposed incinerator, jammed the cafeteria of the school in Northeast Portland. Several people carried protest signs with sayings such as "Portland doesn't need another Superfund site" and "Toxic waste is another crime against N.E."

Several of those testifying called DEQ's examination of Ko-Am's application superficial.

The public hearing was the second on the matter. At the first, in late May, no one testified. But citizens said later they had not done so because they had not been notified of the hearing.