

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0063/04

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to the Commission

Subject: Incineration of railway sleepers

Three combustion plants for sludge, household waste and railway sleepers respectively are planned in the cross-border Europark industrial zone between the municipality of Coevorden in the Netherlands and Emlichheim in Germany. The combined processing capacity will be 720 000 tonnes a year. Electricity will also be generated (60 Megawatt hours a year) which is to be marketed as 'green power'.

Railway sleepers are treated with wood preservatives such as tar and creosote and should be regarded as hazardous waste under Decision 2000/532/EC. The incineration of railway sleepers is controversial owing to the proven emission into the air, soil and water of fine dust, heavy metals (chromium and arsenic), hydrocarbons and dioxins.

Old railway sleepers are so heavily contaminated with chemicals that they need to undergo detoxification in special plants just like hazardous chemical waste.

The developers of the combustion plants are keen to have the licensing issue settled by 20 June 2004 as after that date it will no longer be possible to build waste incineration plants. The licence would be valid for 20 years.

Does the European Commission not agree that the incineration of impregnated railway sleepers should be prohibited?

Does it not share the view that electricity generated from waste incineration should never be designated green power as this misleads consumers about its origin?