

Mr. Ada Shaw
P.O. Box 280296
Kansas City, MO 64109

Dear Mr. Shaw:

Thank you for your January 5, 2000 message to President Clinton regarding the use of volcanoes to burn municipal solid waste. The White House sent your message to the Environmental Protection Agency so that we could respond to you.

We believe that waste management is not an easy task and that there is no one solution to the problem. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) promotes an integrated waste management approach. We believe that a combination of management options must be used to meet the waste management needs of communities nationwide.

The first option is source reduction, which reduces the amount and toxicity of waste before it is generated. Source reduction may occur through the design and manufacture of products and packaging with minimum toxic content and minimum volume of material.

The second option is recycling the waste materials. Recycling is the preferred alternative for those wastes generated after source reduction has been explored. Recycling reduces the amount of waste that must be landfilled or combusted. Composting of organics, such as food and yard wastes, also helps divert waste from being disposed.

The third option is combustion and landfilling of those wastes that cannot be reduced, reused, or recycled. Combustion reduces the amount of non-recyclable waste that must be landfilled and, in addition, offers the benefit of

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energy recovery. Landfilling is essential to handle non-recyclable wastes, non-combustible wastes, or the ash that is left over after combustion. Landfilling can also facilitate energy recovery through the collection of methane gas.

With regard to your suggestion to dispose of solid waste in volcanoes, we know too little about the environmental risks posed by waste disposal in volcanoes to ensure the protection of human health and the environment. Both combustion and landfilling must be performed in an environmentally sound manner and controls must be implemented to minimize any potential release of hazardous pollutants. EPA has published regulatory requirements for the control of air emissions from municipal waste combustors. We have issued national standards for designing municipal solid waste landfills to ensure protection of human health and the environment. We have also studied combustion ash and determined what types of landfills it is safe to dispose this material in.

The enclosed document, The Solid Waste Dilemma: An Agenda for Action, provides a further explanation of the types of integrated waste management options that can be used to manage wastes. I have also enclosed a copy of the Decision-Makers Guide to Solid Waste Management. This document provides an overview of municipal waste management issues, discusses program options, and lists criteria for evaluating the different waste management options available.

Thank you for sharing your ideas with us. We appreciate your interest in the environment.

Sincerely yours,

Elizabeth A. Cotsworth, Director
Office of Solid Waste

Enclosures

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