



Cork Harbour Alliance for a Safe Environment
West End Terrace , Cobh Tel 021 4815564
Email: info@chaseireland.org

30 March 2006

REVIEW OF NATIONAL HAZARDOUS WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Dear Sir or Madam,

Please accept this submission on behalf of Cork Harbour Alliance for a Safe Environment (CHASE), with regard to the review of the National Hazardous Waste Management Plan.

CHASE is a voluntary organisation promoting and coordinating the efforts of nine groups in and around the Cork Harbour area to secure national waste management practices at local, regional and national level.

It is imperative that in any waste management plan, not alone are social and economic principles considered, but also that health and the environment must be given the same priority. With this in mind, the EPA's Mission Statement must be changed to ensure that public health and the environment are fully protected.

The first NHWP was a statutory document drawn up under the Waste Management Act 1996. The plan put forward was an ambitious plan with "prevention" as its cornerstone, in accordance with the waste hierarchy of both Irish and EU policy on waste management.

If the plan had been fully implemented and adequately funded, it would have provided a real opportunity towards achieving the prevention targets set out in the plan, and limited the overall quantities of hazardous waste being generated. It would also have contributed greatly to the reduction in the quantities of hazardous waste for disposal.

The establishment of the various committees that were to be responsible for guiding the overall implementation of the plan and promoting the prevention programme, which was the cornerstone of the plan, was haphazard, poorly funded and, sadly, failed to achieve its aims. Under such conditions how could the plan work, move forward and have any hope of achieving the priorities of prevention and maintaining the "standstill scenario" as stated in the plan?

The first NHWMP also failed because there was too much focus placed on disposal, ie incineration, rather than on prevention and/or recovery. There was significant scope within the plan, and within the Waste Management Act 1966, for the promotion of prevention and recovery of hazardous waste. A wide range of options could have been used, both voluntary and regulatory, to ensure the success of the principles of recovery and prevention. This was not done. The shift of focus was unfortunately towards disposal and took priority over the other more laudable options. This was due in part to strong lobbying by the incineration industry because of the potential for profit, which unfortunately undermined the success of the plan.

Finally, the failure to implement the first National Hazardous Waste Management Plan was due to the lack of funding on the part of the Government. The estimated budget to ensure the success of this plan was in the region of €55 million. As far as can be ascertained, approximately €5 million has been spent on the campaign, much of it on PR.

NHWMP was in principle a good plan and would have gone a long way in the treatment, prevention and reduction of Ireland's hazardous waste. However, the success of any plan is dependent at the outset on full commitment by government, particularly in terms of financial support, without which any plan is doomed to failure.

In the Annual Report of the NHWMP Implementation Committee it states that any progress with respect to the plan's recommendations were achieved in an unplanned and uncoordinated way. The success of the second National Hazardous Waste Management Plan is dependent on full funding

being made available and the plan being implemented in a logical, structured and coordinated manner. Anything less will undermine the success of any future plan.

The current plan discusses the establishment of an infrastructure which would make Ireland self-sufficient in waste management. It also discusses the limitations that member states may impose on the importation of waste and states that this is a major bottleneck. There is no supporting evidence for this. Best practice with respect to waste management is not necessarily self-sufficiency. Best Available Technology in relation to Ireland may be based on exporting some of our hazardous wastes for recovery or disposal overseas. Successful waste treatment is based on critical mass. Ireland, being a small, non-industrialised country, does not in truth produce sufficient volumes of hazardous waste to make it either cost effective or efficient to treat it here, for example, fluorescent bulbs, electrical white goods, etc. Ireland, with a population of approximately five million people, is only the size of a small European city. No-one would suggest that cities with a similar sized population should be self-sufficient in waste management. Similarly, it makes no sense that Ireland should be self-sufficient. Waste is a commodity that is traded and moves freely throughout the European Union. The Basle Convention allows latitude where it does not make economic sense for a country to be entirely self-sufficient. There is no reason why this cannot be applied to Ireland.

Proper selection criteria and risk assessment need to be the basis for nominating and deciding on any disposal/recovery strategy. BATNEEC may be the continued exportation of some of our wastes if demonstrated to be more cost effective when compared on a risk basis. This also provides the opportunity to phase out some of the older polluting technologies in place of more innovative and environmentally friendly treatment and recovery methods that are being used globally. These include composting, anaerobic composting, alkaline hydrolysis, clean production and others which have not been given due consideration and emphasis in the first plan.

The “standstill scenario”, ie., that of maintaining waste figures at the 1996 levels, while commendable, was not supported by the provision of resources which were necessary for its success. However, the second plan must be fully committed to the principles of prevention and reduction, as experience throughout the world has shown that such policies are successful in the reduction of hazardous waste generation.

The implementation of such measures would reduce the overall volume of waste to be treated, thereby reducing Ireland’s dependence on landfill/incineration, which are meant to be the last resort after all other options are exhausted. It is a well-known fact that incineration and excessive landfill hinder the success of prevention and recovery. A prevention ethos within Irish society and industry is required to ensure that our waste management becomes self-sustaining rather than the generation of excessive waste for which we then have to find solutions.

While some progress was made in relation to clean production, much remains to be done. CHASE believes that this policy must be more vigorously pursued in the second plan and proper funding made available for it.

A major flaw in the first waste management plan is the withdrawal of grant aid for recovery facilities, while grant aid for disposal is allowed to continue. There is no justification for this and it is against the principles of EU waste management that disposal should take priority over recovery. This has to be rectified in the second plan.

Recommendations made by the participants in the review of the first NHWMP were not followed through. Some of those submitting to the first plan asked for funding and government aid to be made available to ensure the success of their recommendations. This was not done and needs to be rectified in the second plan if participation by third parties is to be any way meaningful.

There is something very flawed about a waste management plan that has as its cornerstone “prevention”, yet makes grant aid available for landfill and incineration. The fact that there are poor collection rates and no funding available for recovery facilities for such things as oil filters, batteries, paints (i.e. household hazardous waste), clearly indicates that there is very little political will to drive the present NHWMP. These areas were identified by submissions made to the first plan and remedies were suggested by those making the submissions but they remain ignored. This will have to change if there is to be responsible and effective hazardous waste management into the future.

With respect to Local Authorities there is a recognition that few of the waste management plans make provisions for effective hazardous waste management. Within the first NHWMP various committees

were meant to give guidance to the authorities in these areas .This did not happen and as a result waste management has been totally haphazard and un-co-ordinated. Again this appears to be due to lack of proper funding. Despite this many authorities have taken the situation into their own hands and try to provide what facilities they can. This will have to be rectified in the next plan as it is very difficult for local authorities and the public at large to do their utmost in the realms of recovery and recycling if they are not supported by the EPA in their responsibility with respect to the NHWMP.

Overall the NHWMP, when it was drawn up in 1999, had great potential to deal with our hazardous waste and the aim to maintain the “standstill scenario” showed commitment at that time to the idea of prevention. It was an ambitious plan that required 100% commitment in terms of funding and the political will to implement it to the full. The committees to be drawn up within the framework of the plan were meant to roll out the plan and drive it forward. However no committee was established for the first three years of the plan and little happened save for the progress of such things as cleaner production, race against waste etc.

Somewhere along the way there was a shift away from prevention, from non-burn technologies, from reduction, product redesign and thermal treatment became incineration only. The entire focus shifted and the principles of the NHWMP were more or less abandoned.

There was no evaluation of non-burn technologies which are being used in other countries. The only evaluation was on incineration and the question has to be asked why has incineration taken precedence over all other methods of hazardous waste management and why has disposal become more favourable than recovery?

It is recognised that Ireland is a small player in the hazardous waste market in terms of the quantities and nature of hazardous waste we produce.

At the National Waste Management Summit 2005, speakers from our biggest waste management companies explained that the success of recovery and recycling will be severely hampered by the EPA or planning authorities creating excess capacity in incineration or landfill (i.e. disposal), and that waste separation recovery and recycling cannot succeed in this climate.

Another speaker indicated that there is no crisis in hazardous waste management in Ireland. There is plenty of capacity overseas, where producers can choose with whom and how they want to dispose of their waste. This keeps costs down, gives producers choice, and avoids a monopoly situation. It also gives us the opportunity to explore newer, cleaner and safer technologies. Once incineration is adopted we are married to it for the next 30 years while newer, better technologies pass us by.

In the opinion of international experts such as Mr Martin Keyes UK and Professor Ken Geiser US, it is premature for Ireland to consider mass incineration at this stage, as we in Ireland are coming to waste management later than any of our European neighbours and can learn from their mistakes. We must also look globally at technologies being used by other countries who have embraced prevention fully in their waste management and who have seen the merit of such a policy e.g. if you don't produce it, you don't have to dispose of it.

If there is a perceived need for any type of hazardous waste infrastructure, it is vital that the new plan stipulates and gives clear guidance that all National and international guidelines, criteria and recommendations be strictly adhered to. This has not happened in recent applications for waste infrastructure and has resulted in a long and protracted battle between communities, developers and some of the authorities.

The Mission statement of the EPA: *“to protect and improve the natural environment for present and future generations, taking into account the environment, social and economic principles of sustainable waste management”* has somehow swung in favour of economic principles and the social and environmental principles have been largely ignored. The playing pitch has to be levelled in relation to such principles and it cannot be business at any price. This is why it is imperative that any waste infrastructure in the future must be dealt with in a holistic way. This is why the mission statement has to be rewritten to now include health and giving equal weight to all four principles, health, environment and socio/economic. Any new plan must take account of the above if progress and implementation of the plan is to be achieved.

Public acceptability of proposed infrastructure will only happen if the host community see transparency and full adherence to all requirements, be they planning or environmental.

It is noted that RPS will consult with outside expertise. Within any review of any plan participation must be meaningful in that the recommendations made by such people as NGOs' be given equal consideration alongside those of senior civil servants and private industry with a vested interest. To that end CHASE would ask for the opportunity to recommend an independent expert to sit on the review board of the second National Hazardous Waste Management Plan

It has been noted by CHASE that RPS has in the past expressed their opinion that they favour incineration. This is clearly a conflict of interest and RPS, though no doubt a professional company, cannot carry out the review of this National Hazardous Waste Plan, as they cannot be objective. CHASE would therefore ask that a company with no expressed interests in incineration be appointed in their place.

We hope that the public participation process now in operation under the SEA directive will be a meaningful process this time. NGOs and communities who submit to such plans do so with no vested interest. They submit to such plans in the hope that their input will be meaningful and that the relevant authorities and Government bodies will take heed. They give their time voluntarily in the hope that their efforts will bring something to the table when it comes to determining plans that will impact on their lives.

As part of the CHASE submission to the review we would like to include comments by Professor Ken Geiser, University of Massachusetts Lowell, for your consideration. We are also including the most recent information available on the health effects of waste incinerators by the British Society for Ecological Medicine and the concerns expressed by the World Health Organisation about particulate matter. We are submitting these documents to emphasise why the Agency should not see mass incineration as a solution to waste management. Six years have elapsed since the last plan and in that time significant information has become available in relation to newer and better technologies and the problems associated with mass incineration, even at permitted EU levels. We trust you will give these documents serious consideration.

We trust that our views will be taken into account in this review and the drafting of the second NHWMP and we will be willing to assist in whatever way we can.

Yours faithfully,

Mary O'Leary, Chairperson,
Cork Harbour Alliance for a Safe Environment (CHASE)