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EPA's Proposed Regulations Could Shut Down Majority of Hospital Incinerators

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EPA recently published proposed rules on medical waste incinerators that hospitals say would be overly restrictive without providing significant benefit to the public health or environment. The definition of medical waste in the proposed rule would include virtually all waste generated in healthcare and research facilities, resulting in increased volume and cost of medical waste. EPA also has proposed that new and existing medical waste incinerators, regardless of size or type, meet the same stringent emission limits, going far beyond the limits intended under the Clean Air Act Amendments. Moreo-

ver, these emission limits also exceed the current requirements of more than 40 states' environmental agencies. In addition, the proposal would impose strict compliance performance testing of emissions and specific training and qualification requirements for incinerator operators that would need to be reviewed by independent agencies. Experts estimated that these proposals may result in closure of 80% of hospital incinerators.

These proposed incinerator regulations are part of a long-standing battle between healthcare facilities and the EPA. In a September 1994 report released by the EPA, medical waste incinerators were identified as the major source of dioxin pollution. A special expert panel of the American

Hospital Association (AHA), convened to respond to the EPA report, released data in early January 1995 that showed that medical waste incinerators contributed to 0.2% of total toxic equivalents and 1.5% of the known sources of dioxin, and not 55% as the EPA claimed.

A public hearing on the proposed incinerator regulations was scheduled to be held on March 28, 1995, and comments on the proposal were due on April 28, 1995. EPA does not plan to issue the final regulations until April 1996. Copies of the 240-page proposed rule may be obtained from the EPA at (202) 260-7548.

FROM: EPA Proposed rules on medical waste incinerators. *Federal Register* (60):10653; February 27, 1995.