

# Waste Not

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for rational  
resource management

# 86

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## **CALIFORNIA: RESIDENTS AND CITIES BATTLE AGAINST PROPOSED 1200 TPD RDF INCINERATOR FOR SAN MARCOS. ONE OF THE LONGEST RUNNING INCINERATOR BATTLES IN THE U.S.**

The new wordspeak for incineration in California is **transformation**. First referred to as incineration, then waste-to-energy, the burning of municipal waste is now officially referred to as **transformation**. The origin for transformation appears to have come from the incinerator industry because they wanted California to keep incineration in its new waste management bill. Governor George Deukmajian is credited for insisting that incineration be kept in the bill. The San Marcos incinerator battle has to rank among the longest running in the country. The initial proposal was put forward in 1982 and the citizens response was to form the **North County Concerned Citizens (Citizens Group)** in February 1983 to oppose the incinerator. The **Citizens Group** has not only remained active but support, membership and momentum has grown each year. The politics and public relations used by the proponents of this incinerator have been intense and slick.

**MAJOR PROPONENTS:** The driving force has been the County of San Diego's Public Works/Solid Waste Department. Coupled with the county's desire to build the incinerator is the determination of the San Marcos city officials to build it. City officials believe that the city will reap millions of dollars in property taxes from the incinerator. Even though California has three operating 'state-of-the-art' incinerators that all have serious environmental and economic problems, the city officials response is that San Marcos' incinerator will be different.

**MAJOR OPPONENTS AND LITIGATION SUITS:** There are three cities, aside from San Marcos, that abut the incinerator site (**Encinitas, Carlsbad, Escondido**) and all three are opposed to the incinerator and all are in litigation with San Marcos, San Diego County, and the CA Pollution Finance Control Authority. The **Citizens Group** is involved in four litigation suits. **Christworld Ministry** which runs the **Questhaven Retreat** (close to the site) has been an unswerving opponent of the incinerator since 1984. They are in litigation and have provided the financial backbone to sustain litigation. As many as eleven litigation suits are current against the incinerator proposal.

**THE PROPOSED OWNERS AND OPERATORS:** **North County Resource Recovery Assoc. (NCRRA)** is the local entity that drives the incinerator. They are a wholly owned subsidiary of **Thermo Electron** of Waltham, MA. During the years **Thermo Electron** had partnerships with **SCA Services** (was the third largest waste hauler in the country, now defunct) and with **Combustion Engineering**, who left the project in June 1989. **Thermo Electron** has never built a garbage incinerator before. This project never went to bid, even though it will be the county's most expensive public works project yet. **Thermo Electron** operates two bio-mass co-generating plans in Woodland and Mendota, CA; three wood-burning cogenerating plants in Springfield and Whitefield, N.H. and one in Athens, Maine, and a coal-fired cogenerating plant in Dade County, FL (in litigation).

**MAJOR CONSULTANTS:** **Henningson, Durham & Richardson - HDR.**

**AIR POLLUTION CONTROLS:** Baghouse, dry lime scrubber and a catalytic converter.

**COSTS:** Estimated at \$315 million. The **Citizens Group** estimates that **NCRRA** has spent up to \$20 million to get this incinerator built. Most of the money has gone to the consultants. San Diego County has agreed to pick up \$14 million of **NCRRA's** expenses.

**BONDS:** The **California Pollution Control Finance Authority** bonded \$185 million in 1985 for this incinerator. They have extended escrow on these bonds three times. They have stated that if the incinerator is not built by November 30, 1990, they will not renew the escrow. These bonds are tax-exempt municipal bonds that allowed **Thermo Electron** to qualify for an investment tax credit.

**ASH:** California is the only state that we know of that has put into law that ash from transformation (incineration) has to be tested once a month and if it tests hazardous it has to be disposed of in a hazardous waste landfill. In San Marcos the ash issue has been avoided. There has been no discussion on the siting of the ashfill. There are no specifics in the documents on ash handling or disposal.

**SITING OF INCINERATOR:** In a small, barren valley that is surrounded by a heavy band of residential homes. Though the incinerator is sited in San Marcos the closest residential areas are in the city of **Carlsbad**. San Marcos is approx. 20 miles north of San Diego and six miles from the ocean.

**'WASTE AGE' MAGAZINE FEATURED STORY ON "RARE SITING VICTORY" IN SAN MARCOS:** On Sept. 15, 1987, residents of San Marcos voted on whether or not to build the incinerator. As described by public relations consultant to the San Marcos incinerator project, Tom Sheppard in an article he wrote for the Sept 1988 issue of Waste Age: "...rather than allowing the opponents to define the terms on which the project would be debated **NCRRA** decided it would initiate the election. By doing so the city council was able to draft a ballot measure that accurately described the project and its benefits..." In his article Tom Sheppard failed to point out the following:

\* **NCRRA** tactics to get the vote concentrated efforts on particular sections of San Marcos, especially the mobile home park sites. The carrot offered to mobile home residents was that with the incinerator tax revenues the city would help the residents to buy their own property. The P.R. team went into mobile home parks and offered **free catered dinners** and **free open bars (!)** to help communicate their message. There were large turnouts to these events in the mobile home parks.

\* Only residents of San Marcos could vote on whether or not to build the incinerator even though (1) this will be the **county's** most expensive public works project; and, (2) the populations of the four cities abutting the incinerator site are:

**San Marcos 30,000; Encinitas 50,000; Carlsbad 60,000; Escondido 95,000.** The vast majority of the residents surrounding the incinerator were not given the opportunity to vote which coincided with the fact that the cities they lived in were opposed to the incinerator project.

\* California is a state where people can vote by absentee ballot, even if they are not out-of-town on the date of the vote. Absentee ballots were passed out in the mobile home parks and people were encouraged to send in their ballots ahead of time. The **Citizens Group** says it was the absentee ballots that won the vote for the incinerator. The vote was won by approx. 200 votes. **NCRRA** consultants produced a 12 1/2 minute video tape that they mailed to some residents, and put copies in the libraries. The video portrayed incineration as 'the dawn of new age' that would eliminate landfills. Copies of this video are available from the **Citizens Group** for \$8. Address below.

\* Officials in San Marcos told the residents that they expected a very low turnout for the vote and because of that expectation they would only open **one-fourth** of the polling places in the city. The **Citizens Group** says that most of the opened polling places favored the mobile park home areas.

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**TOM SHEPPARD**, author of the Waste Age article, worked for former County Supervisor, Roger Hedgecock, who voted on the landfill bid in 1981. Hedgecock was indicted in Oct. 1984 with a \$1.2 million lawsuit for not disclosing contributions from people affiliated with the firm who got the bid. Hedgecock was also charged with accepting money from another non-trash-related scheme. **Tom Sheppard** was indicted along with Hedgecock for participating in Hedgecock's illegal contributions. **Sheppard** pleaded guilty and was let off lightly. **Sheppard** worked for Hedgecock while he was supervisor and as his campaign manager when Hedgecock ran for Mayor of San Diego. Hedgecock was elected Mayor in Nov. 1984 and resigned in Dec. 1985 because of the charges against him.

For more information contact the: **North County Concerned Citizens**, PO Box 2042, San Marcos 92069. They publish a bi-monthly newsletter.

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