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Covanta Environmental and Labor Violations

Covanta Energy, a U.S.-based waste incineration firm, has been cited by U.S. regulatory agencies for the following violations of environmental and labor statutes:

Environmental Violations

- ✓ In October 2008, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection fined Covanta U.S. \$45,600 for excessive emissions of toxic nickel and related compounds at an incinerator the company operates near Philadelphia. Nickel emissions for a waste combustor at the plant were more than twice the permitted level, according to tests conducted in November 2006.¹ Nickel compounds are known human carcinogens, according to the World Health Organization.
- ✓ In September 2008, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection cited Covanta for exceeding the allowable emission rate for dioxins and furans at its incinerator in Pittsfield by nearly 350%, according to tests conducted in 2007. The agency also cited the facility for failing to report other violations of its operating permit during 2008, and fined Covanta U.S. \$7,653.² The World Health Organization also classifies dioxin as a known human carcinogen.
- ✓ The Florida Department of Environmental Protection fined Covanta U.S. \$11,100 in July 2008 for excessive dioxin/furan emissions at the company's incinerator in Okahumpka earlier that year.³
- ✓ In September 2007, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection cited Covanta for excessive dioxin/furan emissions at the company's incinerator in Wallingford during July 2007.⁴
- ✓ In March 2006, the Hawaii Department of Health found that an incinerator Covanta operates near Honolulu had exceeded the emission limits for dioxin/furan and lead during 2005, and fined the company U.S. \$6,200.⁵
- ✓ The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has repeatedly cited Covanta for air pollution at three incinerators the company operates in that state. During 2009, the agency has fined Covanta U.S. \$26,900 for violations at a facility in Warren County from 2003 to 2007, and U.S. \$20,000 for violations at a facility in Union County from 2007 to 2009. The violations at both incinerators included excessive emissions of sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide.⁶
- ✓ In August 2008, the New Jersey agency also fined Covanta U.S. \$14,025 for air pollution violations at the company's incinerator in Newark from 2006 to 2008, including for illegal carbon monoxide emissions and for exceeding the state's "opacity" limits for visible emissions.⁷

- ✓ The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has repeatedly cited an incinerator Covanta operates in rural Lancaster County for air pollution violations. Since 2005, the agency has issued ten “consent assessments” against Covanta at the facility, penalizing the company a total of U.S. \$131,800. The violations have included excessive emissions of sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, hydrogen chloride, and nitrogen oxide from 2004 to 2008.⁸

Labor Standards

- ✓ In June 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor cited Covanta for serious violations of safety rules at its incinerator in West Wareham, Massachusetts, and imposed penalties of U.S. \$13,500. The violations included an accumulation of fly ash on energized 208-volt electrical equipment, flexible cords “hot-wired” into electrical equipment as a substitute for fixed wiring, unguarded lamps exposing workers to burn hazards, and emergency lighting units missing or not functioning.⁹
- ✓ The Department cited the same Covanta facility in April 2009 for safety violations found during an October 2008 inspection, and fined the company U.S. \$6,375. The unsafe conditions included electrical equipment “maintained” with cardboard and duct tape, and improper storage of oxygen and acetylene cylinders side-by-side with no barrier between them.¹⁰ In addition, the safety agency had previously cited Covanta for failing to require employees fighting a fire inside the West Wareham plant in March 2007 to wear appropriate protective clothing.¹¹
- ✓ In May 2009, the U.S. National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint charging Covanta with maintaining illegal work rules at 46 Covanta facilities throughout the U.S. The government’s complaint is scheduled for a hearing in October 2009.
- ✓ In June 2009, the Board amended its complaint, charging Covanta with numerous other unfair labor practices at the West Wareham plant, including by illegally withholding bonuses and wage increases from employees at the facility because they had voted for union representation.¹²

Utility Workers Union of America Local 369 represents employees at Covanta’s incinerator in West Wareham, Massachusetts, USA. The company has failed to agree to a collective agreement for these employees, despite workers there having voted for union representation in May 2008. Please contact us for more information concerning our campaign for justice for Covanta employees.

¹ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Pennsylvania_environmental_violations.pdf
² http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Massachusetts_environmental_violations.pdf
³ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Okahumpka.pdf
⁴ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Wallingford.pdf
⁵ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Hawaii.pdf
⁶ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Warren_Union.pdf
⁷ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_NJ_Newark_env_citations.pdf
⁸ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_Lancaster.pdf
⁹ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Citation_June1-09.pdf
¹⁰ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/OSHA_Complaint_SEMASS.pdf
¹¹ http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_safety_citation_SEMASS_fire_2007.pdf
¹² http://www.cjcw.org/notice/Covanta_consolidated_complaint.pdf