

PRESS RELEASE

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APPG CALL FOR CAUTION OVER EFW IS “UNNECESSARY AND MISLEADING”

The Environmental Services Association (ESA) has today (Wednesday 15 December 2021) responded to a recent report calling for caution on new energy recovery capacity, as “unnecessary and misleading”.

The report, published by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Air Pollution, provides a synopsis of a series of presentations delivered by a selective group of speakers on the health and air quality impacts of waste incineration – surmising that both local and national government should take a cautious approach to the development of energy recovery infrastructure, with some speakers calling for a “moratorium”.

However, in reaching its position, the report does not draw evidence from the many studies which conflict with the information presented to the APPG – much of which has also previously been rebutted during multiple public enquiries.

For example, a 2020 study by Air Quality Consultants for the Greater London Authority conducted a comprehensive literature review of 35 recent academic studies on pollutants emitted from energy from waste plants and the assessment of related population exposure and health risks. On the basis of the literature review, the report concludes that: *“Any potential health risks associated with direct emissions from modern, effectively managed and regulated EfWs in London are exceedingly low.”*

Furthermore, the use of energy recovery in England is approved by Public Health England (PHE) and, following the results of a major study on municipal waste incinerators by Imperial College London published in 2018 and 2019, PHE stated that:

“Well run and regulated municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health. While it is not possible to rule out adverse health effects from these incinerators completely, any potential effect for people living close by is likely to be very small. This view is based on detailed assessments of the effects of air pollutants on health and on the fact that these incinerators make only a very small contribution to local concentrations of air pollutants.”

Like any other source of energy generation based on the combustion of solid or liquid fuels, the energy recovery process produces emissions and these are predominantly steam, oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide along with very small quantities of pollutants.

These emissions are closely regulated in England by the Environment Agency and plants must operate within strict emissions limits set by the regulators, but most typically operate at just a fraction of permitted emissions levels. As a result, these vital facilities make only a small, if detectable, contribution to local

concentrations of pollutants, such that any impact on health from reduced air quality is negligible, while serving an important public function.

Executive Director of the ESA, Jacob Hayler, said: *“It is very disappointing that the APPG has chosen to publish this unnecessary and misleading report that presents a one-sided and selective view on the safety of essential energy recovery facilities in the UK.*

Multiple studies have concluded time and time again that any safety risk associated with emissions from modern well-run energy recovery facilities is very small, if indeed it exists at all – but this does not stop UK EfW operators from striving for, and meeting, ever-higher regulatory standards for these facilities.

Energy recovery facilities are among the most heavily regulated in Europe and play a vital role in our national infrastructure. In accordance with the waste hierarchy, they have helped to avoid sending hundreds of millions of tonnes of waste to landfill over the past few decades and they will continue to play an important role even as recycling performance increases dramatically, as we anticipate it will, over the next fifteen years.

Under even the most ambitious recycling scenarios, however, the UK does not yet have sufficient energy recovery capacity to avoid sending residual waste to landfill, so it is essential that more capacity is developed to balance capacity against the UK’s needs now and in future.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

In 2021, the ESA published a comprehensive position paper on the role of Energy Recovery, which rebuts many of the points raised by the APPG. The full report can be accessed [here](#)

The **Environmental Services Association** (ESA) is the trade association representing the UK’s resource and waste management industry. Our members are directly transforming the way the UK’s waste is managed in pursuit of a circular economy and are leading the sector in an effort to decarbonise recycling and waste management operations.

The ESA works with all levels of government, regulators and the public to deliver a more sustainable waste and resource management solution for the UK. You can find out more about us and our members in our **Annual report** for 2020/21.

For further details please visit www.esauk.org

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