

# Healthy Hospitals and Healthy Food Systems

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In 1995, garbage incinerators and medical waste incinerators were two of the largest sources of dioxin identified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,<sup>1</sup> and medical waste incinerators alone were responsible for 10% of the mercury emissions into the environment according to an EPA report.

Of all the places  
to dispose of  
**hospital waste**  
our food shouldn't  
be one of them.

**Our hospitals should  
stop poisoning us.**

Mercury in tuna fish. Dioxin in milk. Medical waste incinerators burn PVC plastics and medical supplies that contain mercury. The dioxin and mercury go up the smokestack, land on fields and water—sometimes thousands of miles away from the source—and come back to us in meat, fish and dairy products. New information from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency names medical waste incineration as a leading source of mercury and dioxin contamination of our food supply.

In light of this news, you'd think the leaders of the American Hospital Association (AHA) would do everything in their power to solve this problem. Instead, they hired a high-powered consultant who worked to weaken the EPA's rules on medical waste incineration and to spread misinformation about the devastating health impacts of dioxin.

Dioxin is a highly toxic chemical that is stored in our body fat. When a woman becomes pregnant, it can disrupt the healthy development of the fetus. When a woman breast feeds her baby, dioxin gets released and transferred to the



*Of the millions of tons of medical waste that hospitals dispose every day, 75% or less actually needs to be burned. PVC plastics used in tubing and IV bags have highly toxic dioxin when incinerated.*



*Don't something to solve air, mercury and dioxin from hospital incinerators get deposited in water or on land, the metals then concentrate in the muscle and fat tissues of the fish and come that we feed our children.*



baby. The EPA reports that adults consume 300-600 times the "safe" amount of dioxin, with breast feeding babies getting 15,000-30,000 times that amount.

The tragedy is that incineration is completely unnecessary for 98% of hospital waste. Nearly all medical waste can safely be separated, recycled and reused and disposed of with other cost-effective means.

It's time for the American Hospital Association to take a leadership position to help their member hospitals stop poisoning the very communities they serve. In the meantime, it's your right to know the practices of your local hospital. Call them and ask if they or a sub-contractor incinerates their waste.

The 70 organizations that make up Health Care Without Harm want to help the AHA get a second opinion on medical waste. We have already worked with dozens of hospitals to prevent toxic pollution. And we stand ready to work with any and all hospitals who want to remove medical waste from their plates—without putting it into ours.

**Call your local hospital today, and ask what they are doing to avoid dioxin and mercury poisoning.**

Health Care Without Harm is a nonprofit serving to inform the public, health care professionals and decision-makers of the need for a healthier future. One of the 70 organizations making up Health Care Without Harm are: the General Fund of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and the Green Cancer Fund.

**HEALTH CARE without HARM**

For more information, visit:  
www.healthcarewithoutharm.org  
Center for Health, Environment and Justice  
P.O. Box 1000, New Canaan, NY 10842  
www.healthcarewithoutharm.org



- **Health Care Without Harm** is an international coalition of over 440 organizations in more than 50 countries, working to transform the health care industry so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment.

# Health Care Without Harm's Goals:

1. Create markets and policies for **safer products, materials and chemicals in health care.** (Mercury, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic and brominated flame retardants.)
2. **Eliminate incineration** of medical waste, minimize the amount and toxicity of all waste generated and promote safer waste treatment practices.
3. Transform the **design, construction and operations** of health care facilities to minimize environmental impacts and foster healthy, healing environments.
4. **Encourage food purchasing systems that support sustainable food production and distribution, and provide healthy food on-site at health care facilities.**

# Health Care Without Harm's Goals:

5. Secure a **safe and healthy workplace** for all health care workers.
6. Ensure patients, workers and communities have full **access to information about chemicals** used in health care and can participate in decisions about exposures to chemicals.
7. Promote **human rights and environmental justice** for communities impacted by the health care industry, while assuring that problems are not displaced from one community or country to another.

# Health Care Without Harm Campaign

Over 400 member organization

Over 50 countries

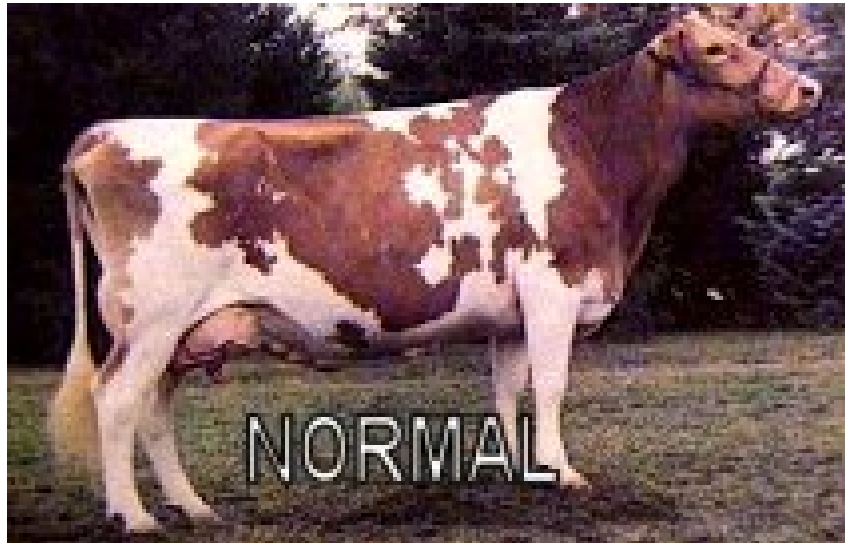
# HCWH Food Work Group

- Working with hospitals to adopt food procurement policies that: provide nutritionally improved food for patients, staff, visitors, and the general public
- Create food systems that are ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible - thereby demonstrating an understanding of the inextricable links between human, public, and ecosystem health.

## Elimination of non-therapeutic antibiotics



# Elimination of Bovine Growth Hormone



# Eliminating GMO



# Promoting Sustainable Farm Practices

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# Eliminate the use of Pesticides



# Promoting Seasonal Foods



# Promoting Local Foods



# Promoting the Right to Know



# Food Work Group Activities

- Monthly conference calls
- Working with Group Purchasing Organization
- Working with Food Services
- Food Med (Nov 2005 – San Francisco)

**[www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)**

# Menu of Options: Steps to Healthier Food in Hospitals

- ❑ Antibiotic-free meat/poultry
- ❑ rBGH-free milk
- ❑ Organic and other certified foods
- ❑ Certified coffees
- ❑ Locally-sourcing food
- ❑ Fast-food free zone
- Farmers' markets
- Hospital gardens
- Compost and reduction of food waste
- Hospital food policy
- Vending machine use

# Hospitals for a Healthy Environment “H2E”

American Hospital Association

American Nurses Association

Health Care Without Harm

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

# Maryland Hospitals for a Healthy Environment “ MD H2E ”

Maryland Hospital Association

Maryland Nurses Association

Maryland Department of the Environment

Health Care Without Harm

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