Wood ash not only hazardous; it's radioactive

R/C

5-6-91

On April 25, two area legislators introduced amendments to House Bill 5602, An Act Concerning Permits issued by the Department of Environmental Protection Agency. These important amendments which were unfortunately defeated would have strengthened certain environmental standards of the Department of Environmental Protection and the Connecticut Siting Council.

One amendment concerned designation and disposal of wood ash produced from wood-burning incinerators. The amendment required the same strict guidelines for the disposal of wood ash as is required of other hazardous waste. Ash produced form trash-burning incinerators is already designated and handled as hazardous waste.

At the very least, wood ash should be designated as hazardous waste. More critically, however, wood ash should be designated as radioactive waste.

Scientists nationwide, including from Yankee Atomic Electric Company, have determined that radioactivity in wood ash is a major source of radioactivity released into the environment. The August 1901 issue of Science News reported that wood ash contains, in many cases, 10 times or more radioactivity than nuclear power plants are permitted to release.

Radioactivity in wood ash tested in New England is particularly high. Wood ash contains high levels of radioactivity because trees act as natural filters of airborne pollutants and store the pollutants.

Federal law requires releases from nuclear power plants to be disposed of as radioactive waste if they contain even one percent of the radioactity detected in wood ash. Wood ash subject to the same regulations as other radioactive and hazardous waste would cost wood burners more than $30 billion annually for disposal or storage.

This information is crucial in light of the proposed Bio Gen facility. Industrial wood burning produces approximately 900,000 tons of ash per year which is often recycled into fertilizers for commercial and private use.

Unregulated wood ash, chock full of radioactivity, is an environmental health and waste disaster waiting to happen. It is only a matter of time before this issue is again reviewed by both the state Legislature and Congress. Let your representatives know you are concerned.

Charlene LaVoie, Community Lawyer
Winsted