

# Committee pragmatic on burning issue

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CAPE TOWN — Parliament's environmental affairs and tourism committee has adopted a middle path in dealing with the thorny question of waste incineration, deciding against both an outright ban and a *laissez faire* approach in favour of strict regulation.

The issue was raised during the committee's deliberations on the National Environmental Management Waste Bill, which was adopted last week and will be debated in the National Assembly soon.

Cement producers that use incinerated waste for their cement kilns were so concerned about a possible ban that they made last minute representations to the committee about the need to retain incineration. Incineration is also used for the destruction of hazardous medical waste and could be used in the co-generation of electricity.

On the other hand, groundWork, a non-governmental organisation, disapproved of the original bill because it did not decisively reject incineration and was so vehement in its call for it to be banned that it took the matter to Public Protec-

tor Lawrence Mushwana, who is considering the application.

"Incineration is a violation of our constitutional right to a healthy environment. We believe that the department of environmental affairs and tourism is betraying this right because of industry pressure," groundWork told Mushwana.

It said all "burn" technologies resulted in the release of dioxins and furans (dangerous, cancer-causing chemicals) into the atmosphere. Heavy metals such as mercury were also released in many cases.

In its final form, the bill provided that applications for

licences to treat waste by incineration would have to supply the department with information about the types of waste to be incinerated; the existence of incinerators in the area that could do the job; and alternative environmentally sound methods to treat the waste.

The bill also stipulated that any regulation dealing with waste incineration would have to be submitted to the committee for scrutiny.

Bobby Peek of groundWork said these measures were a positive step, but groundWork was concerned about the lack of capacity in the department to

monitor the incineration.

"Alternatives to incineration are already being used successfully. In KwaZulu-Natal, all commercial medical waste incinerators have been closed. Companies in the province are using alternative non-burn technologies successfully to treat medical waste," he said.

Democratic Alliance environmental affairs and tourism spokesman Gareth Morgan supported the committee's pragmatic approach towards incineration, which he said recognised its health problems and also acknowledged the role it played in economic processes.

