

Sunday, 16 September 2012

To the Editor
The Mercury Newspaper
By email: mercuryledletter@dbl.newsltd.com.au

Dear Editor,

Southern Waste Solutions has received a number of queries about whether 'toxic' waste will be received by the C-cell proposed for our landfill facility at Copping.

A 'toxic' substance is one that could harm us if ingested, inhaled or absorbed through the skin in sufficient concentrations and volumes. It is important to recognise that concentration and volume are critical determinants of whether a substance could have toxic effects. Substances, including controlled wastes, can be toxic at high concentrations and volumes, but non-toxic at low concentrations and volumes. When describing the toxicity of a substance, concentrations, volumes and the potentially affected species must all be specified.

None of the wastes that will be received by the C-cell could exert toxic effects through casual or incidental exposure. Wastes that could do this need to be sent to special treatment facilities interstate, such as high temperature incinerators. Southern Waste Solutions would not want these wastes nor would the EPA Director approve them.

The controlled wastes that will be approved by the EPA for acceptance by the C-cell will be managed so that the potential exposure to people and the environment could never be in such high volumes that they could exert toxic effects.

Many substances, including those we use every day in our own homes (such as laundry, cleaning and garden products), can be toxic if they are ingested in sufficient concentrations and volumes. This fact alone is no reason to ban these substances from our homes. Instead, we manage them carefully by keeping them away from situations where we might ingest them. We control our potential exposure to them so as to prevent them harming us.

Exactly the same approach is taken with controlled waste. These wastes are designated controlled wastes precisely because they have the potential to harm us or the environment if they are not managed properly. When we store controlled waste, we need to do so in facilities designed to cut off any potential exposure pathways, so that they are not ingested, inhaled or absorbed by us. This is what the C-cell will do. It will lock controlled wastes away in a purpose-designed facility, so that the community is no longer potentially exposed to them through their temporary storage at inappropriate sites scattered all around the state.

The commitment of Southern Waste Solutions to construct a C-cell is good news for Tasmania. We will finally be able to hold our heads up and say that we are doing what every other state is doing – taking responsibility for our waste and protecting our communities and our environment from the harm that those wastes may otherwise cause.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Bell
Chief Executive Officer
Southern Waste Solutions