

news

Incinerator health risks denied

When North Yorkshire County Council last year identified seven possible sites for a waste incinerator, concerned residents at one of them near Thirsk formed the Dalton Incinerator Steering Committee to oppose the plans.

The residents were initially concerned about the costs of the council committing to a 35-year contract and the possibility that recycling levels would fall once an incinerator had been built. But they were soon alerted to public health concerns and decided to examine them.

When they did, DISC members received a letter from Kirklees Council threatening legal action for displaying a campaigner's claims that an incinerator in the West Yorkshire borough was linked to high infant mortality levels.

DISC's David Andrews said some of this material had previously appeared in newspapers and the group wrote back to object at what he described as "Kirklees Council's attempt to gag free speech".

The campaigner was Michael Ryan, who in 1999 saw his 19-year-old son David die of leukaemia, just a year after his mother, living in Erith in South London, had died of the same illness. Concerned by other local cases – including the death of one of his son's school friends – the retired civil servant looked for a link. He found both his son and his mother had lived close to an incinerator.

After analysing data on the health of people living near incinerators, he claims young people particularly are vulnerable to microscopic particles released into the air during incineration.

Ryan looked at the data for all of London's 625 wards on live births and infant deaths between 2002 and 2008. In 14 there were no infant deaths. In comparison the South London borough of Southwark, which has two incinerators on

its borders, had the highest rate of 14 deaths per 1,000 live births. Further north in the borough of Enfield the highest levels of deaths were found to be in the Upper and Lower Edmonton wards that back on to the incinerator sited there. Ryan argues that the pattern is repeated across the country.

He has produced a map of infant death rates in the Kirklees area, which suggests that some of the highest rates are in wards closest to the incinerator in the

"The rate of infant deaths is a highly emotive issue."

borough. It was displaying this information that led to Kirklees Council threatening DISC with legal action because the authority maintains there is no evidence for the claims.

Geoff Bell, principal legal officer for Kirklees Council,

said: "The high rate of infant deaths highlighted in North Kirklees is a highly emotive issue and one of great concern to the council and Kirklees NHS. Detailed investigations have taken place in an attempt to identify the reasons for this and address them.

"In January 2008 Kirklees NHS produced a detailed report of its investigation and findings, which identifies clear factors [including high levels of smoking in pregnant women and evidence of maternal malnutrition] for the higher infant death rates in North Kirklees. There is no evidence whatsoever that the higher death rate is in any way due to air pollution of any kind."

The council's position is backed by the Health Protection Agency. Its spokesman, Dr Michael Clark, said: "Provided modern incinerators are well designed and maintained, their contribution to air pollution at

ground level is likely to be very small.

"We reject all criticism by Michael Ryan that we have failed to protect the public. The HPA has provided impartial expert scientific advice on this issue. It is for other authorities to decide whether to invest in modern municipal incinerators as an alternative to landfill and to ensure the incinerators are properly run and regulated."

When the HPA was formed in 2003 its then chief executive Pat

"The government should be doing much more."

Troop promised it would study the long-term effects of chemical exposure from landfill sites and incinerators. Yet, when asked, the agency was unable to provide details of these studies.

Meanwhile a study conducted in Japan has reported that there

End of the party system



With bookies slashing the odds on a hung parliament, leading political analyst Professor Jon Tonge has predicted 6 May will be the last time British electors vote in first-past-the-post elections.

Tonge, politics professor at Liverpool University, told *The Big Issue in the North* that the Lib Dem breakthrough is radically re-shaping the electoral landscape and the two party system is in its death throes.

Tonge predicts this will be the last election fought under the current system. Photo: Tim Power

Tonge is writing a book – his fifteenth – analysing the 2010 general election. He said: "A hung Parliament has become not a certainty but by far the most likely outcome now." Chances of the Conservatives getting the crucial 326-seat working majority are fading fast, he added.

"I think this really is a watershed because it's the end of the two party system," said Tonge. "Yes, we've had a three party system in terms of electoral votes cast since the 1970s. But that was never reflected in representational

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News in brief

is a “peak decline in risk with distance from the municipal solid waste incinerators for infant deaths and infant deaths with all congenital malformations combined”.

This concerns Paul Holmes, MP for Chesterfield, who is involved in a campaign against a proposed incinerator in his constituency. Late last year he was told by health secretary Andy Burnham that no recent assessments have been made on the presence of a functioning incinerator and the incidence of infant mortality across Britain.

“Given the huge public concern about the possible dangers and given the relative lack of a track record then the government should be doing much more to proactively monitor any effect from these plants,” said Holmes.

“Incineration and gasification is a mainstream part of the government waste strategy, not least because landfill is running out, and so they should be less complacent about the fears of communities where these plants are proposed.”



Ryan claims young people living near incinerators may be exposed to microscopic particles. Photo: Steve Ryan

MARK METCALF

terms, in the composition of the Westminster Parliament.

“This will be the last election ever fought under the first-past-the-post system. That’s the prediction. In the next five years there will be some form of proportional representation because no party will be in such a commanding position, with an overall majority, to renege on commitments to electoral reform.”

In 1997 Blair’s landslide saved him from having to concede electoral reform to the Lib Dems. Now, in virtually all scenarios, “the Labour Party simply can’t ignore reform as it did in 1997”, said Tonge. “It would have to offer the Lib Dems the alternative vote.”

Only a most improbable Lazarus recovery by the Conservatives can now save the first-past-the-post system, according to Tonge. He favoured the single transferable vote as more democratic than the

alternative vote carrot, which Labour has dangled in front of the Lib Dems. But both would enhance British democracy.

He believed the greater overlap between Labour and Lib Dems – both depend on centre-left votes – means that coalition dealmaking is more likely between Brown and Clegg than Clegg and Cameron. But electoral reform is the price

“People are frightened of electoral change.”

Brown would have to pay if no party has a majority on 7 May.

“On balance an end to first past the post is a good thing in terms of the will of the electorate,” said Tonge. “I am concerned about the introduction of the alternative vote. I would much rather a system in which Parliament reflects the express desires of

the electorate and that means a single transferable vote.

“People are frightened of electoral change but it has worked quite well in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

“We’ve talked a lot about how to clean up politics, how to make politics more relevant, more connected to people. And you can’t carry on with a system which in representational terms carries on a two party system when clearly the express will of the electorate is not for just two dominant parties at the expense of others.

“It’s not sustainable. It hasn’t really been sustainable since the 1970s but we’ve soldiered on with it. The share of the electorate’s vote captured by the big two parties has been declining for years now, broadly. Yet we’ve made no alterations to our voting system. That just can’t be sustained.”

TIM POWER

THE BUS AND THE BIKE

Passing too close, pulling out from stops without looking and overtaking when unnecessary are the three leading gripes cyclists have about bus drivers, according to a survey by the Love Your Bike campaign in Greater Manchester. The campaign will be sharing its findings with bus operators and transport authorities but insists it will also be asking bus drivers about what aspects of cyclists’ behaviour are most annoying.

IN FOR THE COUNT

Leeds City Council is appealing for more people to take part in the local and general election counts on 6-7 May. Over 350 people have registered to be counters but the council still needs an additional 150 people. There are also vacancies for count supervisors, polling station inspectors, postal vote collectors and postal vote opening clerks. Both counts take place at the John Charles Centre for Sport in Middleton. Call 0113 395 2858 or see www.leeds.gov.uk.

ROLE OVER, MODELS

The loutish and drunken behaviour of our sporting heroes reported in the media has little or no effect on the drinking habits of young people, new research has found. Researchers at the universities of Manchester and Western Sydney say their findings, published in Drug and Alcohol Review, rubbish the idea that sports stars act as role models for those who follow sport.

MACONIE TALK

Despite being stranded in Venice due to the volcanic ash cloud, Stuart Maconie has made it back in time to celebrate Edge Hill University’s 125th anniversary at its Ormskirk campus on 29 April. In An Audience With Stuart Maconie the writer will take a light-hearted look at some of his fondest Edge Hill memories, like the first time he saw The Smiths play, and touch on his recent book *Adventures On The High Teas*. For free tickets email corporateevents@edgehill.ac.uk, quoting reference 03.

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News in brief

Six months after it was promised by the Health Protection Agency, no details have emerged of a study into the impact of waste incinerators on babies and children. And one former doctor involved in a public health campaign believes the study will not go ahead.

In early April HPA chief executive Justin McCracken responded to criticism from campaigner Michael Ryan that the agency had failed to conduct its own studies on the health impact of waste incinerators.

After two of his children died, Ryan obtained data from the Office of National Statistics suggesting that infant death rates were much higher in neighbourhoods downwind of incinerators.

McCracken responded to Ryan's campaign by writing to him saying the agency had "concluded that an epidemiological study of birth outcomes around municipal waste incinerators would have sufficient power to produce reliable results. Work is now progressing in developing a detailed proposal."

Legal action

In April the HPA said a research team at Imperial College, London would conduct the study. But it did not respond last week to *The Big Issue in the North* when asked when the work would start.

Ryan's critics have argued that it is not the microscopic particles emitted by incinerators that are behind the deaths but poverty.

In 2009, when Ryan's work on an incinerator in Kirklees was displayed at a meeting in Thirsk, Kirklees Council threatened campaigners in the North Yorkshire town with legal action on the grounds that "there is no evidence whatsoever that the higher death rate in areas close to the incinerator is in any way due to air pollution of any kind".

Smoking and maternal malnutrition, Kirklees Council argued, were to blame.

But Ryan found that the Chingford Green area of wealthy Waltham Forest, close to



Below: Huddersfield incinerator. Above: Campaigner Michael Ryan, who pushed the HPA into promising a study into incinerators. Photo: Steve Ryan

Incinerator study's future in doubt



Britain's largest incinerator, had the second highest rate of child deaths in the whole of London.

He also points to a Japanese study from 2004 suggesting that there is a "peak decline in risk with distance from the municipal solid waste for infant deaths and infant deaths with all congenital malformations combined".

Downwind

In the 1990s former GP Dick Van Steenis researched the use of asthma inhalers in Lancashire and discovered six times as

many were used downwind of cement works than upwind.

He told *The Big Issue in the North*: "Ryan's work is an embarrassment to the HPA. If they do the study they will have to examine it."

"It shows that where incinerators are situated, whether in poor or affluent areas, that the number of deaths downwind is eight per thousand higher amongst infants than upwind."

"There's also statistics showing above average levels of heart attacks amongst adults that could be studied."

"I am not convinced this study will go ahead."

The HPA was unwilling to respond to Van Steenis's claims but a spokesperson said: "Well run and regulated modern municipal waste incinerators are not a significant risk to public health."

MARK METCALF

UNFAIR PAY

Cleaners of trains in Carlisle have been given support in the House of Commons as one MP became outraged over the meagre 1 per cent pay rise given to them by their employer. London Heyes and Harlington MP John McDonnell tabled a Parliamentary petition criticising Carlisle Cleaning and Support Services and saying it should award its hard-working staff an increase that would deliver dignity at work and a living wage.

SLEEPING DOGS

A Dogs Trust survey has revealed a 118 per cent rise in the number of stray dogs put to sleep in Yorkshire. In 2010 266 dogs were destroyed where 580 were put down in 2011. The national increase is 11 per cent on the previous year, indicating that 20 dogs are put to sleep each day. The Dogs Trust says a rise in the number of unwanted bull breeds and the recession are behind the rise. Encouragingly however, the overall number of stray dogs in Yorkshire has decreased by 12 per cent.

CHARITY BOOST

St Georges Crypt, the charity for homeless people in Leeds, has received a £20,000 donation for its current 80th birthday appeal. The donation came from the *Stewarts Law Foundation*, a charity established by the leading litigation law firm to benefit other charities. Daniel Herman, head of the Leeds office of *Stewarts Law*, praised St Georges Crypt for its immediate and long-term support to those in need.

RIOTS BILL

A report by the Merseyside Police Authority has revealed that policing Liverpool during the riots cost the taxpayer almost £2 million. Police forked out £1.73 million in overtime alone as well as £240,000 in non-staffing costs. The total cost of the riots is expected to top the £2 million mark as investigations continue. The authority is likely to submit a bid to the Home Office to cover the costs, the outcome of which is uncertain.

Song remains the same for Lullaby

Charity report on air pollution not published

The Lullaby Trust, which aims to prevent unexpected deaths in infancy, has refused to give a publication date for research into air pollution although its initial findings were reported to donors last September.

Presenting those findings, lead researcher Dr Ian Litchfield of Birmingham University said the research “indicated ambient air pollutants, particularly PM10 and NO2, were associated with increased Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) mortality”.

The study, which was centred on the West Midlands, was aimed at examining the occurrence of SIDS and short-term variations in air pollution for PM10 particulate matter, ozone, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide and oxides of nitrogen as well as its components NO and NO2. “PM10” refers to particles to up to 10 micrometers in size.

Extensive research

Shrewsbury’s Michael Ryan first became concerned about air pollution after he lost two of his children, one at age 14 weeks, and considered that their deaths may have been the result of having lived downwind of an incinerator.

His extensive research, using electoral ward statistics from the Office of National Statistics, led him to claim that infant mortality levels, which dropped to an all-time low of 3.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013, are above average in wards downwind of incinerators.

Ryan was key in forcing Public Health England (PHE) into conducting a study into the impact of incinerator emissions on babies’ and children’s health. This was first promised in 2003 but began in 2012. Preliminary results were expected in March 2014 but it is now

hoped that the findings will be published next year.

Ryan said: “The Lullaby Trust report mirrors the PHE study in that it is delayed and also doesn’t look at nanoparticles less than PM2.5, which, unlike the bigger PM10, can penetrate deepest into the lungs. The trust should also have examined not just SIDS but all infant deaths as the former is around a quarter of the larger total of 2,686 in 2013.

‘Confidential’

“My research and that of prominent scientists dating back decades and in many different countries challenges the view that deprivation, poor parenting and cultural practices are the only reasons for infant mortality.

Sadly, I fear that too many organisations are willing to ignore this work.”

A Lullaby Trust spokesperson said the final report is “confidential to us.. it could still be some time until it is published”.

The spokesperson added: “We are not aware of Michael Ryan’s research. But when our report is published we will get our scientific advisors to review it before taking into account whether we should include his findings in our recommendations – as we do for all potential risk factors.

“As far as we are aware there is currently no conclusive evidence for a link between SIDS and air pollution.”

MARK METCALF



Michael Ryan has criticised the delay in the report. Photo: Steve Ryan

NEWS IN BRIEF

HATE CRIME

Hate crime has risen by 18 per cent with the majority being racially motivated, new figures show. Home Office statistics reveal police recorded 52,528 hate crimes in 2014-15, up from 44,471 the previous year. Eighty per cent of them were racist attacks. The figures follow David Cameron’s decision that Muslim hate crime will be recorded separately in a bid to understand the extent of Islamophobia.

FOSSIL DIVESTMENT

Greater Manchester Pension Fund has lost an estimated £148 million in 18 months on its investments in coal mining, according to research by campaign group Platform. GMPF has the largest investment in fossil fuels of any local authority and the Governor of the Bank of England recently warned that the potential losses from falling share prices were huge. Lobbyists are calling on GMPF to divest from fossil fuels.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE CCTV

Over 30 MPs across the north have signed a parliamentary motion in support of the move to install compulsory CCTV in slaughterhouses. One hundred MPs have joined Animal Aid’s Say Yes To Slaughterhouse CCTV campaign. Between 2009 and 2014 Animal Aid filmed secretly inside 10 randomly chosen UK slaughterhouses and found evidence of cruelty and law-breaking in nine of them.

LIVERPOOL DEVOLUTION

Phil Davies has denied that Liverpool will be excluded from the next wave of devolution after a minister told the BBC it had put in a disappointing bid. The six councils of the Liverpool city region have delivered their submission and Davies said there have been positive talks with government since. Two of the councils are believed to be sceptical about a deal.

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to bring down the waiting list or reduce homelessness. Many people can't afford private renting costs and buying is a dream.

"Councils and the government are continuing to get rid of council and housing association housing when we need more of it. The Housing Act will make things worse as housing associations are going to start selling off some of their properties.

"We need councils to sit down with their tenants, those on the waiting list and housing campaigners to work out how we are going to resist the government – and not do their dirty work for them."

Blame Thatcher

Andy Burham, the MP for Leigh who hopes to be Labour's candidate in the Greater Manchester mayoral elections next year, said: "The seeds of this housing crisis lie with Margaret Thatcher and her selling-off of council houses in the 1980s and 1990s whilst prohibiting the use of the proceeds to build more homes."

He said he was concerned that the mayor's £300 million Housing Fund was intended to pay for similar schemes to the First Street and Ancoats ones.

"My top priority will be to encourage a substantial increase in council and social housing in all 10 boroughs of Greater Manchester," he said. "The majority of the Housing Fund should be used to provide loans and guarantees to our councils and housing associations to expand the public housing stock and build the affordable homes for rent that we need."

According to a Patrizia statement: "Manchester is one of the most sought-after cities in the UK for property investment. There is a particular appetite for PRS [private rented sector] development, driven by a lack of good quality private rental accommodation, a thriving employment market, and a city council focused on the benefits of regeneration."

MARK METCALF

Air pollution and SIDS

Two major studies have been stalled

It remains unclear when the findings of two major studies into unexpected deaths in infancy will be published.

Public Health England (PHE) first promised a study on the impact of municipal waste incinerators (MWI) on infant mortality rates in 2003. Led by a team from the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU) at Imperial College London, it began in 2011. Preliminary results were envisaged in 2014 but last year PHE announced they were likely to be released in early 2016.

Regional mortality highs

The PHE study has examined 22 MWIs, including those in Bolton, Grimsby and Kirklees – districts where infant mortality rates are higher than regional or national averages.

The Lullaby Trust, which aims to prevent unexpected infant deaths and provides support for bereaved families, funded Birmingham University in 2012 to undertake research on the role of ambient air pollution in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) mortality. Initial findings last year indicated that "ambient air pollutants were associated with increased SIDS mortality". But the full report remains unpublished.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has found that mortality rates were highest amongst groups in routine and manual occupations, indicating that deprivation is the main reason behind infant mortality. Other factors cited are poor parenting and cultural practices.

But the results of both reports will be eagerly studied by Michael Ryan, who first became concerned about air pollution when he lost two of his children, one at 14 weeks, and considered their deaths could be related to having lived downwind of an incinerator.



Michael Ryan lost two children

When he examined London wards around MWIs he found that, even in affluent areas such as Chingford Ward Green in Waltham Forest near the Edmonton incinerator, death rates were above average. In Bolton five of the top six wards with the highest infant mortality rates border the incinerator in the Great Lever ward.

Ryan's research is supported by a major study in Japan in 2004, which found "a decline in risk from distance from MWIs for infant death".

Dr Ovnair Sepai from the PHE toxicology department said: "The unanticipated complexity in gathering data has delayed the project but it is expected that papers from the work will be submitted by SAHSU to peer reviewed journals this year, and it is likely to be a few months after submission for the papers to be published."

He stressed that PHE continues to believe that MWIs are not a significant risk to public health.

A Lullaby Trust spokesperson said: "Our study has been submitted for publication to the Scientific Reports journal. It is being peer reviewed and if it accepted it will be published online at some point this year, when the Lullaby Trust will publish its response."

MARK METCALF

NEWS IN BRIEF

FAMILY KITCHEN

Working families in Barrow struggling to survive on zero hours contracts are being forced to rely on a soup kitchen. Barrow Community Kitchen, which meets Sundays 3-5pm, St Matthew's Community Hall, was set up for people struggling with benefit cuts, but the need among working families has increased. It now feeds 60 people and delivers food.

HOMELESSNESS BILL

MPs are being called to support a private member's bill championing a law aimed at tackling homelessness in England. Currently single homeless people can be turned away by councils but the Homelessness Reduction Bill, which has received the backing of national charity Crisis and draws on the recommendations of experts, would require all councils to take action.

NORTHERN DEVOLUTION

Improving infrastructure should be at the heart of devolution deals to significantly boost local growth, environmental sustainability and quality of life in the North West, according to a report by the Institution of Civil Engineers. ICE's State of the Nation report welcomed the creation of Combined Authorities but set out improvements to current arrangements in a 10-point plan.

EU RENEWABLES IMPACT

The development of renewable energy in the UK could be stalled as one of the immediate impacts of the UK's vote to leave the EU. Plans from Siemens to invest in wind energy in the UK have been halted until the country clarifies its position in the EU. The manufacturing hub at Alexandra Dock in Hull will not be immediately affected but Siemens will not make new investments. *

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* See page 12 for our coverage of the international response to Brexit

SIDS CHARITY 'IGNORED DECADES OF RESEARCH'

The Lullaby Trust finds pollution link to SIDS

Father says warnings were long ignored

A man whose studies found that infant mortality rates were higher close to incinerators has accused a leading children's charity of "being asleep for decades" after it released the findings of a delayed study on the role of air particles in unexpected infant deaths.

In 2012 the Lullaby Trust, which aims to prevent sudden infant deaths, funded research led by Dr Ian Litchfield, at Birmingham University. The final report, now published in the British Medical Journal, has concluded: "Ambient air pollutants... may show an association with increased sudden infant deaths or SIDS."

Such deaths are the leading causes of death among healthy infants between one month and a year old. Around 300 cases occur annually in the UK.

Pollution exposure

The report, based on 200 SIDS cases over a 10-year period in the West Midlands, recommends further studies "on the role of air pollution on SIDS and... how we might reduce pollution exposure among infants".

Michael Ryan's research about air pollution was sparked after he lost two children, one at 14 weeks, and considered their deaths may be related to pollution caused by living downwind of an incinerator. He has found that, whether incinerators are sited in affluent or poorer areas, infant mortality rates nearby are above average.



Campaigner Michael Ryan lost two children to SIDS and believes it's due to having lived near a waste incinerator

He cites other scientists who challenge the norm that deprivation, poor parenting and cultural practices are the only reasons for infant mortality. A number of MPs have used his work to ask Parliamentary questions.

In 2015 the Lullaby Trust promised to "get our scientific advisors to review [Ryan's] research... as we do for all potential risk factors." Now a Lullaby spokesperson has admitted this has not happened because it only makes recommendations "based on consideration of peer-reviewed research studies in academic journals".

The spokesperson added: "We are not aware of any research that Ryan has published of this quality."

Ryan, whose self-financed research has been reported

extensively in *Big Issue North*, has been key to forcing Public Health England (PHE) to conduct a study on the impact of waste incinerators on infant mortality levels. First promised in 2003 this began at Imperial College London seven years ago.

"Wasted time"

Preliminary results were expected in March 2014. PHE has said it expects to submit its findings to peer-reviewed journals by the end of this month. The organisation continues to affirm its belief that incinerators are not damaging to the health of infants.

A retired local government officer from Shrewsbury, Ryan said: "I didn't believe the Lullaby Trust would examine my research. Yet

now they are suggesting an association between air pollution and SIDS. They could have just read a 1985 book, *SID: Patterns, Puzzles and Problems*. This was co-authored by their now vice-President Sylvia Lush, the Countess of Limerick."

Ryan said the book examined a peer-reviewed study implicating air pollution in sudden infant death.

"This study was, like mine, ignored in the Lullaby Trust report," he said.

"This has deeply upset me as the Los Angeles study was in 1981, before my children died.

"Lullaby is well named as it has been sleeping for decades. They have wasted time and money."

MARK METCALF

Incinerator inquiry postponed

Skip hire firm's plans face public opposition

A public inquiry into whether Calder Valley Skip Hire will be allowed to incinerate waste at its West Yorkshire site has been adjourned until November. The company appealed to the secretary of state when its planning application was refused by Calderdale Council on the grounds that polluting emissions would reduce air quality locally and be harmful to health.

Inaccurate expert advice on the chimney flue height — which affects the dispersion of gases released by incineration — led the planning inspector to make an adjournment after four days of evidence recently.

Long-running inquiry

The company claimed the proposal would be small scale, incinerating waste otherwise sent to landfill, but it attracted significant local opposition and there was over 1,000 responses from members of the public opposing the plans.

A maximum of six tons an hour would be burnt — around 15,000 tons annually. This represents a sixth of the amounts incinerated at the smallest municipal waste incinerators (MWI), the safety of which has been the focus of a long-running inquiry into any link with infant mortality by Public Health England (PHE).

MWI burn solid waste to convert it into ash, flue gas and heat to generate electricity. More than 35 per cent of all local authority waste is now being incinerated despite emissions that may pollute the air, water and soil and have harmful impacts on the environment and animal health.

The issue of whether there are any links between infant mortality levels and MWI has been consistently raised in recent years by MPs and campaigners but PHE has not announced that its study, first



Michael Ryan criticised PHE's silence on emissions. Photo: Steve Ryan

promised in 2003 and started in 2011, has now concluded. Researchers at Imperial College London examined all 22 MWI, including those in Bolton, Kirklees, Sheffield and Stoke-on-Trent, operating across Britain between 2003 and 2010.

A PHE spokesperson said the study did not prompt any change to its position and that there is "no evidence of a link between modern MWI and infant mortality... these incinerators are not a significant risk to public health".

Infant mortality

The apparent unwillingness to publicise a study appearing to confirm what PHE has contended for many years has left campaigner Michael Ryan "distinctly unimpressed". Ryan's research, reported on by *Big Issue North* since 2011, was significant in forcing PHE to conduct the study.

He points out that other international studies have produced very different findings, such as in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, which looked at births and deaths in Massachusetts in 2001-2007 and found "statistically significant associations between lifetime exposure and infant mortality".

Ryan began his own studies after two of his children died, one at 14 weeks, and considered their deaths could have been related to living downwind of an incinerator. He challenged the accepted wisdom that high infant mortality levels can be solely attributed to deprivation and cultural problems.

When he mapped infant mortality levels for all 625 London wards between 2002 and 2011 he discovered that the wealthy Chingford Green area of North London, located close to the Edmonton waste incinerator, had a rate of 10.3 infant deaths per live births in the nine years. The national average was 4.56.

Nationwide analysis produced similar results. In Bolton, which burns 90 tons annually, five of the top six wards with the highest infant mortality levels border the Great Lever incinerator.

"The public is concerned about MWI emissions. Cross-party MPs have raised the issue in Parliament. Why the silence?" said Ryan. "The subject is still alive as the study is flawed."

Big Issue North put Ryan's points to PHE and to those who conducted the study but did not receive a response.

MARK METCALF