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Dangerous dioxins – the facts

- Dioxins are a family of chemicals with similar structures and properties. Dioxins are known to cause a wide range of toxic effects in animals, some of which occur at very low doses.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) says dioxins cause cancer in humans. Dioxins have also been linked to birth defects, reproductive disorders, hormone disruption and skin diseases.
- The Government recently warned that half of Britain's babies and toddlers and a third of the UK's adults already take in more dioxins into their bodies than is safe. The Government recommended a five-fold cut in the maximum allowed dioxin intake
- Dioxins occur only very rarely in nature. They are formed as a result of the burning process, for example during household waste incineration. An average incinerator releases enough dioxins to give one million people the government recommended daily dose every day although not all the dioxins released will come in contact with humans or animals in the short term.
- One study has found that 30 – 50 times more dioxin may actually be released by incinerators than is reported by UK measuring methods. This is due to the sporadic nature of dioxin testing at UK
- Over 95% of human exposure to dioxins comes through our food. Dioxins can travel for miles and contaminate farmland. Animals and fish take up dioxins from the food they eat and also from any soil or sediment they also consume while eating, for example cows consume a significant amount of soil when grazing.
- Fat in milk, meat, fish, eggs, cheese and dairy products are our main source of dioxins.
- Dioxins bioaccumulate - built up in our body fat over our lifetimes. Once in our bodies they cannot be destroyed.
- Babies are exposed to high levels of dioxins built up in their mother's breast milk during her life. Infants may take in up to 12% of their lifetime exposure to dioxins through breast milk. (note it is still widely recommended that breast feeding is the best option for feeding a baby)

For more information please contact Greenpeace Press Office on 0207 865 8255