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health care

# NEWS RELEASE

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**Contact:** Monica Buckhorn, ☐ 703-333-2970 ;  
Stacy Malkan, ☐ 202-234-0091 , ext. 14;  
Kelly Heekin, ☐ 202-234-0091 , ext. 15;

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## **ILLINOIS GOV. IS FIRST IN NATION TO CALL ON HOSPITALS TO PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH BY CLOSING INCINERATORS**

### *Health groups also urge closure of massive Clinton incinerator*

September 15, 2004-- Health Care Without Harm today praised Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich for being the first governor in the nation to call on state hospitals to close their medical waste incinerators. This precedent-setting move was prompted by neighborhood activists pushing to close Evanston Hospital's medical-waste incinerator, which is a block away from an elementary school.

Late Monday, the Evanston City Council voted 8-1 to adopt an ordinance that bans medical waste incineration within the city limits and requires the Evanston incinerator be closed by Oct. 15.

"This is a huge victory, not only for the residents of Evanston, but for communities everywhere," said Clare Kelly Delgado, from No Burn Evanston, the group that introduced the ordinance and staged protests against the incinerator. "The Evanston community came together, at all levels, to work toward improving the quality of our air and water for our children and for all citizens."

Just hours before the City Council's decision, Gov. Blagojevich held a press conference threatening to enact legislation to ban medical waste incineration if all the state's hospitals don't voluntarily close their incinerators. Illinois currently has 12 incinerators. Only Florida has more medical waste incinerators still operating.

The Governor's action "comes in response to growing concerns raised by communities near the incinerators and emerging scientific data about hazardous health effects from exposure to toxic medical waste incinerator emissions," said a press release issued by the Governor's office. Incinerators emit mercury and dioxins, which have been linked to cancer, birth defects, and other health problems.

"Hospitals are supposed to provide health care, and hospitals are supposed to promote health care," Blagojevich said at his news conference. "Hospitals are supposed to not undermine public health."

While the Governor's mandate closes the remaining hospital incinerators, one large commercial incinerator remains open in Clinton. This incinerator, owned by Lake-Forest-based Stericycle, Inc., the nation's largest medical waste disposal company, has the capacity to burn up to 26 million pounds of waste per year.

"We praise the Governor's bold action to protect public health by urging the state's hospitals to close their

incinerators. We call on state officials to also join us in urging the closure of Stericycle's Clinton incinerator," said Monica Buckhorn, Health Care Without Harm's Medical Waste Workgroup Co-coordinator.