

Dear friends in GAIA,

First the very best to all for a happy and successful new year.

In late December I completed my 27th trip to Italy in 10 years. Most of my trips have been organized by GAIA member Rossano Ercolini of the group Ambiente e Futuro based in Lucca, Tuscany, birthplace of the great operatic composer Giacomo Puccini. Rossano is a primary schoolteacher by day and one of Italy's leading anti-incinerator activists by late afternoon. He has organized nearly all my trips to Italy. I simply tell him the dates I can manage, and at which airport I am going to arrive and from which I depart and Rossano does the rest. By the time I arrive he has scheduled an itinerary – usually from one end of Italy to the other. In this instance the trip started in Milan, went onto Florence and then to Lucca, then back to Florence two times – for two major events, about which I will write more below- then onto Cosansa near Bari (on the Adriatic coast) and then on to Pesaro and Fano (further North on the Adriatic coast) and back to Milan and home.

Apart from the wine, the food, the climate, the scenery, the history, the art, the music, the culture and the people, there are two important reasons I keep returning to Italy.

1. Thanks to a scandalous law passed by the government in the mid-nineties, utilities are required to purchase electricity from incinerators at THREE times the rate paid to fossil-fuel plants. This subsidy has spawned incinerator proposals from one end of the country to the other. These in turn have generated very intense community battles to stop these proposals. Most of them have been successful in keeping the proposals at bay, however as people are aware from their own countries it is difficult to win these battles with reasoned argument because of the role of corruption in the process. Corrupting local officials is something that Italy is very good at! Because of the intense opposition being generated it is not at all unusual to find myself speaking to crowds over 500 in number.

2. The good news is that Italy has developed some of the most cost-effective door to door (porta a porta) collection systems in the world. Communities from one end of the Italy have reached massive diversion rates in very short time periods. For example, Novara (population 100,000) near Turin has reached 70% diversion in 18 months. Other smaller communities near Treviso (near Venice) and near Salerno in the south have reached over 80% diversion. In all, some 600 communities in Italy are now diverting over 50% of their waste with door to door collection programs. Both citizens and officials who get involved in these programs like them because a) they are cheaper than landfills (and of course far cheaper than incinerators); b) they create local jobs and c) they get rid of the overflowing drop-off containers scattered around town.

The driving force behind these door-to-door collection systems came largely from the Agricultural school in Parco Monza near Milan. In the mid- nineties farmers approached the school asking them where they could get more organic material to return to their soil. The institute studied the issue and came back with the answer: the organic material in the municipal waste stream. However, to use it had to be clean which meant it had to be separated at source and collected door to door. It also had to be collected in a cost effective manner which resulted in the use of biodegradable plastic bags made from corn starch (tests indicate that they are 90% degraded in 30 days). Italy is now the largest manufacturer of these bags in the world. The individual from the Institute most responsible for developing these collection systems and spreading the message across Italy is Enzo Favorino, whose name some of you probably recognize.

I am hoping that Italy can springboard from this success and move into the crucial phase of a Zero Waste 2020 strategy and that is to link community responsibility (which they can clearly achieve) with industrial responsibility which is far more difficult. I have argued that the way to make this linkage is with the RESIDUAL SCREENING AND RESEARCH FACILITY. Such a building would be built immediately in front of the landfill (no waste can go into the landfill without going through this building) and the residuals (non-recyclable, non-compostable and non-reusable items and materials) would go onto conveyor belts where it is screened. More recyclables are removed, ditto with toxics and the dirty organic fraction is shredded and stabilized biologically either via a second composting operation (or via anaerobic digestion), before it goes to the INTERIM landfill. All of this is being done successfully in Nova Scotia. The new component that I am recommending is a RESEARCH CENTER (possibly manned by the local university or technical school) to study the non-recyclable materials to either find local uses for some of them or recommend better industrial design (better industrial design for sustainability) for them. The residuals = bad industrial design. The message that has to be sent from these RESIDUAL SCREENING AND RESEARCH FACILITIES is that "if we can't reuse it, recycle it or compost it, industry shouldn't be making it." We need better industrial design for the 21st Century!

Over the last millennium, Italy has produced some of the most creative people who have ever walked on this planet. Today they have some of the best designers in the world. If Italy cannot design waste out of the system, then no one can, except perhaps Japan, but Japan having built 1800 trash incinerators has little incentive to tackle the real problem of resource management. Instead they prefer like the Swiss, the Germans, the Danes and the Swedes to perfect a bad idea: designing magic machines to destroy resources "safely."

However, Italian researchers like Dr. Antonetta Gatti and Dr. Stefano Molinari have discovered a huge problem which is going to challenge the whole nation of ever achieving a safe incinerator, and that is the issue of the nano-particles they generate. This has spawned a whole new discipline of nanopathology. An excellent review of what looks like an intractable problem for the incinerator industry is reviewed by Cormier and Dellinger and others in the July issue of Environmental Health Perspectives. This article is an absolute must for anyone fighting incineration. It has probably done for the anti-incinerator arguments in the 2000s what the post-combustion formation of dioxins did for us in the 1980s. This article should be presented to any promoters of incineration and they should be asked for a response to the arguments and questions that it raises. While they are busy trying to do this, we meanwhile must capture the high ground by making it clear that "even if you made an incinerator safe you would never make it sensible. It simply does not make sense in the 21st century to spend so much time and money destroying resources we should be sharing with the future!" a quote of mine that goes back several years.

In short, incinerators seek to make the residuals disappear, Zero waste 2020 seeks to make them very visible and use them to drive industrial responsibility, which includes clean production, extended producer responsibility and industrial design for sustainability.

Now for those two events in Florence (Dec 16, 17, 2006).

**On the Saturday before Christmas (Dec 16) groups from all over Tuscany participated in a grand march in Florence in opposition to incineration. The slogan: "Non Bruciamoci il futuro" ("Don't burn the future").**

My day began in Lucca where several local groups met at the railway station and about a dozen of us traveled by train to Florence (about 90 minutes). When we got out of the train we were met by another group sporting their banner. We went to the front of the station where a sound truck was blasting out Bob Marley songs. We were about the first there, but it was very exciting as more and more groups began to arrive with their banners, and in the case of Greenpeace in their moonsuits. Groups came from Castelnuovo Garfagnana; Lucca; Capannori; Borgo A Mozzano; Viareggio; Pisa; Cello-Ponpedera; Grosseto; Siena; Poggibonzi; Prato; Casale; Pistoia; Montale; Agliana; Florence; Sesto Fiorentino; Campi Bisenzio; Rufina; Valdisieve; Greve in Chianti, and Livorno.

By the time we were ready to set off the crowd was very large. We were led by the sound truck down the road from the railway station to the Cathedral – any tourist who has been to Florence will have walked down this street. The music bounced off the buildings. Christmas shopping came to a halt. The police did not hurry us along and in fact even allowed the organizers to halt the march at regular intervals and get on the microphone. By the time we reached the Cathedral we heard that the last people had only just left the station. At the Cathedral I was disappointed that we turned left not right. Right would have taken us in front of the Cathedral and down the biggest tourist street in Florence: the one that connects the Cathedral to the city square where Michelangelo's statue of David stands in front of the famous municipal building (the one with the familiar tower) which is located next to the Uffizi gallery.

However, the left turn took us down a rather narrow street with few people. However, after a couple of blocks we took a left turn, then another and found ourselves in a very large avenue going back towards the Cathedral. We stopped in front of the Provincial government buildings and Rossano Ercolini was given the microphone to blast the government for its promotion of incineration throughout Tuscany. When we started moving again it quickly became clear that we were going to go past the Cathedral and down that route I have already described. The photographers and TV cameras were going crazy getting shots of the banners in front of the Cathedral. But the best shots of all were the ones they took as we went down that main shopping street under the splendid Christmas lights which arched across the street. These were the pictures which made it into the press the next day (at least three papers).

When we arrived at the famous square, the banners were formed into a huge circle and people gathered in the center. Once again Rossano addressed the crowd. Passionate stuff. Then the march and rally ended with the showing of a 20 minute video put together by the Florentine group. The next day's papers put the crowd at 1000, 2000 and 300 respectively. Rossano thought it was somewhere between 3000 and 5000. Whatever the number the march was huge success. No citizen or tourist in Florence that day would have been left in any doubt that communities all over Tuscany did not want to host incinerators and that they supported a better approach – Zero Waste. I have some pictures of this march in jpeg files. If anyone wishes to get copies please let me know.

**On Sunday December 17, in a community center in Florence called "Il Progresso" citizens gathered from all over Italy to attend a national conference on Zero Waste.**

When I say all over Italy I mean it. They came from Turin, Novara, Modena, Bologna, Ferrara, Alessandria, Genoa, Rome, Naples, Acerra, Catania in Sicily, Pesaro, Salerno, and of course from all over Tuscany. The meeting began with a short talk from me on gasification and I made it clear that this is just incineration in disguise. A more honest and appropriate name for this technology would

be a “gasifying incineration”, since the gases liberated in the gasification step are burned to generate electricity. When the gases are burned all the same problems accrue as with a regular incinerator, including the generation of the nano-particles which, because they are so small, can escape from even the most modern particulate control devices. Sadly many officials – and even some “environmentalists” - have been dazzled by the hype surrounding the promotion of this “magic machine.” Currently gasification plants are being proposed for Rome (at the Malogrotto landfill) as well as in many other countries. A 3000 ton facility is proposed for Puerto Rico (at the most outrageous location I have seen for any incinerator). Other facilities are proposed for Ottawa and the Toronto region in Canada. The most upsetting project is the facility proposed for Edmonton’s famous waste recycling center. In fact in their stupidity the Alberta government has put a \$20 million subsidy into this proposal. What makes this sad is that this Edmonton recycling center has an excellent research facility and it would have been an ideal place to have located a Residual Screening and Research Facility. So Edmonton has gone from the potential of being a world leader to one of the world’s sheep. Perhaps we shouldn’t really be surprised since they have also built the largest composting facility in North America to compost the mixed waste stream (after recyclables have been removed) thus generating a dirty compost that has practically no end uses. What a waste!

After my little talk the rest of the meeting was devoted to forming a national group to promote Zero Waste. The big discussion was whether this should just be a national organization or whether they should actually form a political party called Zero Waste! That question was not resolved but forming a national alliance was supported 100%. Rallies are now being planned for Venice and Rome to consolidate still further the national movement against incineration and the promotion of Zero Waste Italy.

If anyone wants to get more information about this campaign please contact Rossano Ercolini at <ambientefuturo@interfree.it>. For those who want to learn more about Italy’s cost effective door-to-door collection systems please contact Enzo Favoino at <favoinomail@tin.it>.

Again all the best for 2007. Zero Waste – Zero Incineration! **“Non Bruciamoci il futuro.”**

Paul Connett