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Burner ash proves safe, owner says

By Dan Bender
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Despite a lack of national or state safety standards, officials of Ogden Martin Systems Inc. say that incinerator ash from the Brooks garbage burner poses no threat to humans or the environment.

David Sussman, an Ogden Martin vice president for environmental affairs, said that, in addition to lack of standards, appropriate tests for leachate still are being worked out by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Leachate is the result of rainwater that filters through ash discarded in a landfill pit.

"Until the EPA establishes firm criteria on the disposal of incinerator ash, states have to develop their own thinking," Sussman, formerly with the federal agency, said. "The state of Oregon insists on testing it."

Ogden Martin, the owner and operator of the plant, has been doing just that in the past few weeks, Fritz Skirvin of the

state Department of Environmental Quality said.

Skirvin said he was observing the tests, although not participating in them.

"Preliminary data indicate that the ash from Marion County does not exhibit characteristics of a hazardous waste," Sussman said. He said, however, that the test method used is appropriate for municipal garbage, but not for incinerator ash.

The test method is too stringent for ash, he said. However, the most dangerous heavy metals, most likely to leach

out, were shown to present no threat, he said.

He said he would not comment further on the tests until all data are available.

About 137 tons of ash a day are deposited in the Woodburn landfill's ash pit. That represents about 25 percent of the weight of the garbage burned daily, plant manager Fred Englehardt said.

The ash pit, lined with Bentonite clay and equipped with an elaborate pipe system to collect the leachate, is the most environmentally sound landfill in the country, Sussman said.

Another pit probably will be constructed beginning next summer, Bob Hansen, county public works director, said. The first pit was designed to last about 18 months, he said.

All funds for the new construction will be generated by tipping fees at the burn plant, Hansen said.

Those fees, which garbage haulers pay to dump garbage at the plant, will more than double to \$25 a ton in March, he said.

The plant began burning garbage at full capacity in September.