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## Put a lid on fumes from cremation

**Dr. Perry Kendall, B.C.'s chief medical health officer, says the provincial government should consider regulating emissions from crematoriums because of possible health risks.**

By The Vancouver Sun May 12, 2006

- [Story](#)
- [Photos \(1\)](#)



Dr. Perry Kendall, B.C.'s chief medical health officer, says the provincial government should consider regulating emissions from crematoriums because of possible health risks.

While there's no evidence that the fumes are harmful, Kendall said, the potential is there for release of many contaminants, including mercury, cadmium and lead.

"It's worth looking at. If you burn anything, you get particle matter," said Kendall. "And depending on the screening, you can get hydrogen chloride, cadmium and lead from pacemakers and mercury from teeth fillings."

B.C. crematorium owners don't have to get emission permits under the provincial Environmental Management Act -- something Kendall says should be considered.

In the meantime, he said, crematoriums should not be located in residential neighbourhoods.

The issue of crematorium emissions is bound to grow, said Kendall, because cremation is popular in B.C. and the province has an aging population.

Kendall said that 78 per cent of bodies in B.C. are cremated rather than buried. Cremation is the popular choice among several cultural groups, including Indo-Canadians. Vancouver has the highest cremation rate -- 80 per cent -- of any North American city, according to cremation industry statistics.

Ron Laturnus, general manager at the Valley View Funeral Home in Surrey, dismissed the notion that a crematorium could be environmentally unsafe.

"I work on a cemetery that has three cremation chambers on site," said Laturnus.

"If there is any evidence that emissions from crematoriums are unhealthy, I'd want to know about it before anybody. But we don't know of any."

Laturnus said that manufacturers of crematoriums rigorously test their technology to ensure that emission levels are not hazardous.

His confidence in cremation technology is not shared by the Interior Health Authority, which recently recommended against a proposal to place a crematorium in a residential neighbourhood in Kamloops.

"We just don't believe it is a wise place to locate these things," said Dan Ferguson, assistant director of health protection for Interior Health.

"From a public health perspective, we believe that crematoria and residential neighbourhoods are conflicting land uses."

Ferguson said the Health Authority decided to "recommend on the side of caution" because there are no environmental or health standards governing levels of emissions.

Kamloops city council rejected the project Tuesday, but Mayor Terry Lake said the decision was based less on any concern about emissions than on the opposition mounted by residents near the funeral home where the crematorium was to be located.

Coun. Tina Lange, explaining her vote to a local newspaper reporter, said while road pollution is probably worse than emissions from a crematorium, "we're stuck with the cars, we're not stuck with the crematorium."

Interior Health had a review conducted on literature about crematoriums. Ferguson said the report's author concluded that fumes from crematoriums are potentially harmful and that they should not be located close to a residential area.

The literature review found that particulate matter, which can be inhaled deep into lung tissue, is the chief threat, said Ferguson.

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