

# Incinerator emissions and high infant mortality rates at electoral ward level

[Michael Ryan](#) made this Freedom of Information request to [Birmingham City Council](#)

 The request was **partially successful**.

**From: Michael Ryan**

**8 October 2012**

Dear Birmingham City Council,

The following press release by baby charity BLISS shows that Central Birmingham Primary Care Trust (PCT) had the highest 2002-2004 infant mortality rate out of 303 PCTs in England.

<http://www.bliss.org.uk/2006/03/28/top-t...>

The ten PCTs with highest infant mortality rates in the above press release are all exposed to incinerator emissions, whilst the ten PCTs with the lowest rates are not. That massive disparity suggests a causal link between infant deaths and exposure to combustion emissions from incinerators.

Researchers in Japan, who examined infant deaths around 63 municipal incinerators concluded:

“Our study shows a peak-decline in risk with distance from the municipal solid waste incinerators for infant deaths and infant deaths with all congenital malformations combined.”  
(J Epidemiol. 2004 May;14(3):83-93.)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15242...>

I wish to obtain the following under the Freedom of Information Act:

1. Any evidence that Birmingham City Council has that emissions from Tyseley incinerator are not harming health.
2. Any assessment that Birmingham City has made about the possible link between exposure to incinerator emissions and infant mortality rates.
3. The infant mortality rates for each of the electoral wards in Birmingham aggregated for the six years 2004-2009.
4. The numbers of live births and also the numbers of infant deaths in each of the electoral wards in Birmingham for the same 6-year period 2004-2009.
5. Any evidence that Birmingham City has that shows that there's not a causal link between exposure to incinerator emissions and

high infant death rates.

6. Details of any research into "birth outcomes" around Tyesley incinerator that's been carried out or instigated following the Health Protection Agency's "incinerator" press release of 24 January 2012:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk/NewsCentre/Nationa...>

Yours faithfully,

Michael Ryan

**Birmingham City Council**

**16 October 2012**



**FOI Response.doc**

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Dear Michael Ryan

Further to your recent request for information under the Freedom of Information Act, please see attached our response.

With kind regards  
Corporate Information Governance Team

Michael Ryan To FOI requests at Birmingham City  
<[FOI #132426 email]> Council  
<[Birmingham City Council request email]>  
08/10/2012 12:06 cc  
Subject Freedom of Information request  
- Incinerator emissions and  
high infant mortality rates at  
electoral ward level

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Yours faithfully,

Michael Ryan

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Please use this email address for all replies to this request:  
[FOI #132426 email]

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**From: Michael Ryan**

**24 October 2012**

Dear Birmingham City Council,

Please pass this on to the person who conducts Freedom of Information reviews.

I am writing to request an internal review of Birmingham City Council's handling of my FOI request 'Incinerator emissions and high infant mortality rates at electoral ward level'.

I have made this Freedom of Information request because Birmingham City Council must have been aware of concerns about incinerator emissions harming health as seen from many newspaper reports including, "Incinerator breaches go unpunished - Poisonous chemicals pumped into atmosphere, report reveals" (Guardian, 22 May 2001), which starts:

"Hundreds of pollution offences being committed by operators of household waste incinerators each year are escaping prosecution by the environment agency.

The incinerators, in built-up areas, burn thousands of tonnes of waste a year emitting gases, chemicals and heavy metals into the atmosphere. The 10 municipal waste incinerators operating in England in the past two years have breached their licences 553 times between them. None has a clean record. The government says that with modern equipment these discharges can be minimised, and it wants to build up to 100 more incinerators."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/20...>

In May 2004, a study of infant deaths around 63 incinerators in Japan concluded:

"Our study shows a peak-decline in risk with distance from the municipal solid waste incinerators for infant deaths and infant deaths with all congenital malformations combined."  
(J Epidemiol. 2004 May;14(3):83-93.)

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15242...>

The Birmingham Post article "NHS puzzled by city's worst in UK infant mortality rates" of 17 June 2008 starts:

"The NHS has admitted it does not know why Birmingham has the worst infant mortality figures in the country."

and yet Birmingham Council has failed to examine Office for National Statistics data in a logical manner.

The Council have also missed the significance of these Parliamentary Questions:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa...>

Andy Love MP, Hansard, 22 June 2011, Column 224W

<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-off...>

Hansard link for 30 Nov 2009 (Paul Holmes MP)

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa...>

Norman Baker MP, Hansard, 17 Sep 2007 : Column 2209W

If Birmingham Council examine the 2004-2009 infant mortality rates at electoral ward level in Solihull and in North Warwickshire, they'll find more electoral wards with very high (at least 10.0 per 1,000 live births) infant mortality rates which, like the high rate wards in Birmingham, form a cluster around the Tyseley incinerator.

It was obvious to doctors in 1944 that exposure to combustion emissions (from industrial & domestic sources) was the driving factor for infant mortality as seen from the following sentence from the "infant mortality" section of a well-known medical reference book:

"As a general rule it (i.e. infant mortality) is lowest in agricultural districts, higher in thickly populated mining and manufacturing regions, and highest in large towns where textile industries are carried on and where female labour is largely employed."  
(Black's Medical Dictionary, 1944 edition, page 471)

The World Health Organisation, as long ago as 1997, were recommending mapping data:

<http://test.cp.euro.who.int/document/e63...>

"Disease mapping & risk assessment for public health decision-making"  
Report on a WHO workshop, Rome, Italy, 2-4 October 1997

A full history of my FOI request and all correspondence is available on the Internet at this address:

<http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/in...>

Yours faithfully,

Michael Ryan

**Birmingham City Council**

**25 October 2012**



**Appeal Acknowledgement.doc**

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Dear Mr Ryan

Please see the attached for your request for an internal review.

(See attached file: Appeal Acknowledgement.doc)

Yours sincerely

Corporate Information Governance Team

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### **Michael Ryan left an annotation (31 October 2012)**

Birmingham City Council should look at the infant mortality rates (2004-2009) released under this Freedom of Information request and map out the rates as was done in Saginaw at census tract level, ie the US equivalent of electoral wards:

<http://www.mlive.com/living/saginaw/inde...>

They should note the words of Dawn Shanfelt, and also realise that winds in Saginaw are mainly from the west. Furthermore, the Saginaw map excludes the two point sources of toxic pollution that are roughly in the centre of the map on a north/south axis - the emissions from which will have plastered eastern Saginaw.

"Infant deaths are a barometer for the health of the entire community," said Dawn Shanfelt, community health section supervisor for the Saginaw County Health Department. "If we can't protect our babies, we have a huge problem."

Here in the UK, I've already mapped the highest 2004-2009 infant death rates in Birmingham & Solihull and this map was submitted as part of my evidence at the Shrewsbury incinerator public inquiry at which Veolia, who operate Tyseley incinerator, alleged no harm to health from incinerator emissions:

<http://www.ukhr.eu/incineration/tyseley....>

Mapping data can be an extremely powerful tool, eg

<http://ukhr.eu/incineration/westmidlandm...>

If Birmingham City Council look at this article:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/oct/17...>

they'll find the following:

"The West Midlands had the highest regional infant mortality rate, with 6.0 deaths per thousand live births, and the south east had the lowest, with 3.5 deaths per thousand live births."

As far as I'm aware, the West Midlands Council with the highest infant death rate in 2011 is Walsall, which is downwind of Wolverhampton incinerator, and had a rate of 9.6 per 1,000 live births - which might be the highest rate for any Council in England & Wales.

Other West Midlands Councils with 2011 infant death rates greater than the regional rate for West Midlands are:

Stoke on Trent 8.4 per 1,000 live births (has incinerator)

Birmingham 8.2 per 1,000 (has incinerator)

Wolverhampton 6.6 (has incinerator)

Sandwell 6.6 (immediately downwind of Dudley incinerator)

The above Guardian article also reports:

"The infant mortality rate (in England & Wales) increased slightly in 2011 from 4.3 deaths per thousand in 2010 to 4.4 per thousand last year."

The rise in infant mortality rates in England & Wales from 2010 cannot be dissociated from exposure to incinerator emissions - given the increasing number of incinerators that have become operational in recent years and the failure of any proper regulation of emissions - or of any checking of relevant data at electoral ward level around incinerators.

The Belvedere incinerator was operational in 2011 and the Havering electoral ward of Rainham & Wennington is immediately downwind with prevailing SW wind. Havering Borough had the highest under-16 child death rate per 1,000 live births in London in 2011 according to the Romford Recorder of 25 October 2012 (page 5) and the electoral ward with the highest child death rate (by far) was Rainham & Wennington ward where the 2011 infant death rate was almost six times greater than the average rate for that ward for the preceding nine years 2002-2010.

**Birmingham City Council**

**9 November 2012**



**Appeal Decision Letter.doc**

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Dear Mr Ryan

Please see the attached for your request for an internal review.

(See attached file: Appeal Decision Letter.doc)

Yours sincerely

Corporate Information Governance Team

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### **Michael Ryan left an annotation (13 November 2012)**

The West Midlands region had the highest infant death rate in 2011 according to ONS data.

When the ONS data is examined for the thirty Councils who comprise the West Midlands Region, the infant mortality rates vary from 0.9 per 1,000 live births to 10.6 per 1,000.

The lack of interest shown by Birmingham City Council and the Environment Agency over the link between exposure to incinerator emissions and higher rates of a range of adverse health outcomes is consistent with the warnings given by Professor Reece Walters in "Crime is in the air: air pollution and regulation in the UK" (September 2009).

Professor Walters' above report outlined the way that the regulatory process isn't fit for purpose to the detriment of anyone exposed to industrial emissions.

The abstract of "Toxic Atmospheres Air Pollution, Trade and the Politics of

Regulation" (CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY, Volume 18, Number 4 (2010), 307-323, DOI: 10.1007/s10612-010-9119-3) by Professor Walters states:

"Air is an essential ingredient for all living things and its properties influence the quality and longevity of life. When polluted, it is estimated that it causes the annual premature death of millions of people and the world-wide damage and destruction of wildlife and natural habitats. This article examines human-made air pollution within a framework of 'eco-crime' and Green Criminology. Using original data on air pollution infringements, it critically examines the shortcomings with existing mechanisms of air pollution control, regulation and enforcement in the UK. In doing so, it identifies how Criminology must continue to push new boundaries and engage with emerging harmful acts of both local and global concern."