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TRASH IS BIG CLIMATE PROBLEM, NEW REPORT FINDS

A zero waste approach revealed as a top climate protection strategy

Washington D.C., June 5 – Legislators in Washington have another tool to confront the climate crisis, according to a new report released today on United Nations World Environment Day. ***Stop Trashing the Climate*** concludes that increased recycling and composting are easily-achievable and essential measures to help meet U.S. greenhouse gas reduction targets being debated this week in Congress. Along with waste prevention, expanded recycling and composting can have the same climate protection impact as closing 21% of the nation’s 417 coal-burning power plants says the report. Coal combustion is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. Released today by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives and Eco-Cycle, the report links America’s trash to use of energy and greenhouse gas emissions, and calls for action to trigger change within a short period.

“Recycling is as important for climate stability as improving vehicle fuel efficiency, retrofitting lighting, planting trees, and protecting forests,” says Brenda Platt, the report’s lead author and co-director of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. “By avoiding landfill methane emissions, composting in particular is a vital tactic in the battle to stop Arctic ice melting. Biodegradable materials are a liability when buried and burned but an asset when composted.” Leading scientists now recognize that action to reduce methane emissions is needed to stabilize atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations, which must peak and decline over the next 15 years in order to avoid widespread and rapid climate change.

Incinerator and landfill companies have lobbied hard to promote waste disposal technologies as sources of renewable energy and as a solution to climate change. As a result, they have gained access to valuable taxpayer subsidies in energy policies. “In reality, incinerators and landfills are bad for the climate,” according to David Cipler, a co-author of the report and the U.S. coordinator for the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA). “These disposal systems gobble up taxpayer money to encourage more of the same garbage. They compete against wind and solar projects while burdening local communities with pollution and debt.”

Carl Pope, Executive Director of the national Sierra Club says, “Incinerators and landfills are relics of an unsustainable past that have no place in our green economy.”

Main findings from *Stop Trashing the Climate* include:

- A zero waste approach based on preventing waste and expanding reuse, recycling, and composting is one of the fastest, cheapest, and most effective strategies to protect the climate.
- Significantly reducing the amount of materials landfilled and incinerated has climate benefits comparable to closing one-fifth of all U.S. coal-fired power plants.
- The one-way flow of materials from extraction, processing, and consumption to disposal directly contributes to climate change. Waste disposal is linked to more than one-third of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions; new resources must be continually extracted to replace those buried or burned.

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- Landfills are a top source of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, and landfill gas capture systems are not an effective strategy for preventing methane emissions to the atmosphere. The global warming impact of methane emissions in the short term is 72 times greater than CO₂ and is three times greater than reported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- Incinerators emit more carbon dioxide per megawatt-hour than coal-fired power plants, and waste 3 to 5 times more energy than recycling conserves.

“A zero waste approach is not only good news for climate stability, it’s also good news for America’s businesses and economy,” says report co-author Eric Lombardi, the director of Eco-Cycle, a Boulder, Colorado-based recycling and zero waste business. “The time to act is now. We cannot afford to pass up this opportunity to create local jobs and new enterprises, while reducing global warming and our reliance on imported goods and fuels.”

Among *Stop Trashing the Climate*’s key policy recommendations:

- Set local and national zero waste targets, focusing on 20-year plans.
- Eliminate subsidies to landfills and incinerators.
- End the practice of waste incineration.
- Stop sending biodegradable materials to landfills and incinerators.
- Expand the national reuse, recycling, and composting infrastructure.

Today community leaders across the country are joining together on World Environment Day in Tallahassee, FL; Providence, RI; Bridgeport, CT; Los Angeles, CA; and Massachusetts to urge elected leaders to redirect the millions of dollars now slated for incinerator and landfill investment toward economically-sound and climate-friendly strategies such as recycling and composting. Calling for an end to business as usual, communities are seeking policies that provide green jobs and healthy solutions to address climate change and poverty.

According to Platt, “On a per-ton basis, recycling sustains ten times the number of jobs as landfills and incinerators. The 3R’s – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – are as relevant today as they were when first introduced in the 1970s. Today we call this approach the zero waste path and include composting, product redesign, and manufacturer product responsibility.”

On World Environment Day, the United Nations seeks to stimulate worldwide awareness of the environment and to enhance political attention and action. Today’s global celebrations focus on solutions and opportunities for countries, companies, and communities to “kick the CO₂ habit” and reduce their climate footprint. *Stop Trashing the Climate* shows a commitment to zero waste is a quick and effective action to address global climate change that every country, company, and community can embrace.

“Landfills and incinerators rank with gasoline-powered cars and coal-burning power plants as major American infrastructure dinosaurs that must be changed from coast-to-coast, and quickly,” says Lombardi.

The *Stop Trashing the Climate* full report and executive summary can be downloaded at: www.stoptrashingtheclimate.org.

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Members of the press:

To join the national press teleconference briefing for journalists, 11:30 a.m. EST June 5, visit www.stoptrashingtheclimate.org.

To set up an interview with sources or if you have questions, please contact: Brenda Platt, Institute for Local Self-Reliance: (202) 898-1610 ext 230

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The Institute for Local Self-Reliance is a nationally recognized organization providing research and technical assistance on recycling and community-based economic development, zero waste planning and implementation, wind energy, and policies to protect local main streets and other facets of a home-grown economy. Since 1974, ILSR has actively addressed the burgeoning waste crisis, over dependence on fossil fuels, and other materials efficiency issues.

<http://www.ilsr.org>

GAIA is a worldwide alliance of more than 500 grassroots organizations, non-governmental organizations, and individuals in 81 countries whose ultimate vision is a just, toxic-free world without incineration. Our goal is clean production and the creation of a closed-loop, materials-efficient economy where all products are reused, repaired or recycled. Worldwide, we are proving that it is possible to stop incinerators, take action to protect the climate, and implement zero waste alternatives.

<http://www.no-burn.org>

Eco-Cycle is one of the largest non-profit recyclers in the U.S. and has an international reputation as a pioneer and innovator in resource conservation. Eco-Cycle believes in individual and community action to transform society's throw-away ethic into environmentally-friendly stewardship. Its mission is to provide publicly-accountable recycling, conservation and education services, and to identify, explore and demonstrate the emerging frontiers of sustainable resource management and Zero Waste.

<http://www.ecocycle.org>