



Factsheet
Top Ten Reasons to Oppose
Maryland House Bill 1121 and Senate Bill 690

House Bill 1121 and Senate Bill 690 would allow trash burning – “waste-to-energy” – to qualify as a Tier 1 renewable energy source in the state’s renewable portfolio standard.

Myth 1: Trash burners are needed to reduce landfill disposal.

Fact: Trash burners encourage waste and wasting. Incinerators do not make landfills magically disappear. 25% by weight of what is burned exits as ash requiring landfill disposal. Incinerators rely on minimum guaranteed waste flows, often called “put-or-pay” contracts. Communities have to pay whether or not they have trash to burn, and as a result, typically burn large quantities of compostable and recyclable materials. These facilities perpetuate the throw-away society and encourage a one-way flow of materials on a finite planet.

Myth 2: Trash burners are cost-effective and financially make sense for Maryland.

Fact: Burning trash is the most expensive solid waste management technology available and is financially risky. Incinerator costs are far higher than the costs for similarly sized recycling and composting systems. A 1,500 ton-per-day facility planned for Frederick County is slated to cost more than \$500 million. A comparably sized recycling facility in Elk Ridge, Maryland, had a capital investment under \$20 million. Incinerators require expensive air pollution control technology, which can represent 25-30 percent of capital costs. Burning trash is also financially risky. Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, considered bankruptcy last year because it faced \$68 million in debt payments related to a failed incinerator. In New Jersey, counties that built incinerators accumulated \$1.35 billion in debt. Voters had to approve a multi-million dollar state bailout. Detroit taxpayers are facing over \$1.2 billion in debt from constructing and upgrading its incinerator. As a result, residents have had to pay exorbitant trash disposal fees over \$150 per ton. Some jurisdictions have raised property taxes to subsidize their incinerators. Montgomery County, Maryland, is one. The incinerator could not attract sufficient tonnage, so tip fees were lowered and property taxes increased to cover the difference.

Myth 3: Modern incinerators do not pollute and have less environmental impact than other sources of electricity.

Fact: Incinerators pollute. All incinerators release pollutants through air and ash emissions. These include acid gases, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, metals, dioxins and furans, and at least 190 volatile organic compounds. Garbage in, garbage out. Coal plants do not burn pharmaceuticals, electronics, and the thousands of chemical compounds found in municipal solid waste. Waste incinerators emit more chemicals such as benzene and trichloroethylene than do fossil-fueled power plants. A recent public health impacts report found that modern incinerators in Europe are a major source of ultra-fine particulate emissions, emissions that are bypassing pollution control equipment.

Myth 4: Incinerators are good for the climate.

Fact: Trash incinerators are bad for the climate. According to the U.S. EPA, incinerators emit more CO₂ per megawatt-hour than coal-fired, natural-gas-fired, or oil-fired power plants. Incinerators are significant sources of CO₂ and also emit nitrous oxide (N₂O), a potent greenhouse gas that is approximately 300 times more effective than carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere. More climate-friendly alternatives to incinerating materials include waste avoidance, reuse, recycling, and composting. Organics recovery is the most effective strategy for reducing methane emissions from landfills. Far from benefiting the climate, subsidies to incinerators will encourage wasting and resource consumption.

Myth 5: Communities with the highest levels of recycling have incinerators.

Fact: Incineration is a direct obstacle to maximizing recycling and composting. Communities with the highest levels of recycling – such as San Francisco and Seattle – have opted against incineration and have instead embraced zero waste planning, which includes food waste recovery through composting and anaerobic digestion. The trend in the country is to recycle and compost more waste, and to burn and landfill less of it.

Many communities across the country have chosen to avoid incineration and have reached very high levels of diversion from landfill.

Myth 6: Trash is renewable.

Fact: Incinerators destroy not conserve resources. Incinerators burn discarded resources and the embodied energy they contain. For every ton of material destroyed by incineration, many more tons of raw materials must be mined, processed, or distributed to manufacture a new product to take its place. More trees must be cut down to make paper. More ore must be mined for metal production. More petroleum must be processed into plastics. On the whole, three to five times more energy can be saved by recycling materials than by burning them.

Myth 7: Trash incineration is widely accepted.

Fact: Trash incineration is widely opposed. The dangers of incineration are widely known and have greatly influenced the public's assessment of municipal solid waste incineration. This is the main reason no new incinerators have been built in the US since the mid-1990s. Massachusetts has had a 20-year moratorium on building new incinerators. Over the last 2 years, as part of updating its solid waste management master plan, the MassDEP has considered lifting this moratorium. It opted against this and instead issued a draft *2010-2020 Solid Waste Master Plan: A Pathway to Zero Waste*, which calls for keeping in place the current moratorium on new municipal waste combustion facilities, expanding recycling and reuse of waste materials, ensuring greater producer responsibility for materials management, and increasing promotion of recycling businesses and green jobs. Environment America, the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Friends of the Earth, and 130 other organizations disagree with public subsidization of burn technologies and have signed a statement calling for no incentives for incinerators.

Myth 8: Incinerators will create green jobs for Maryland.

Fact: Incinerators have a very low job creation potential compared to other solid waste management systems. For every 10,000 tons per year going into an incinerator, one job is created. In contrast, sending that material to a compost facility would create four jobs. Recycling sustains 10 times the number of jobs on a per ton basis as incinerator disposal. However, making new products from the old offers the largest economic pay-off in the recycling loop. New recycling-based manufacturers employ even more people and at higher wages than does sorting recyclables.

Myth 9: Europe is a good model for Maryland.

Fact: Maryland is not comparable to Europe. Europe has extensive policies in place to reduce packaging, require producer responsibility and product take-back, and to eliminate chemicals of high concern in consumer products.

Myth 10: Burning trash will help encourage renewable energy in Maryland.

Fact: Qualifying waste combustion as a Tier 1 renewable would dilute Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard. Burning trash competes with legitimate renewable energy such as wind and solar. Waste combustion also competes with legitimate waste reduction alternatives such as composting and anaerobic digestion. If the General Assembly passes legislation to put incinerators in Tier 1 of the Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), it would dilute the standard so much that it would negate the impact of the RPS in driving the development of renewable energy. There is more electricity generated from incinerators in the PJM region (Pennsylvania New Jersey Maryland Interconnection LLC) than the entire RPS renewable energy requirement in 2011. Maryland would be the only state in PJM with a meaningful RPS to allow incinerators in Tier 1 without geographic restrictions. Michigan and Ohio allow it but require power to be delivered into the state to qualify, and none of the incinerators are in those states. Virginia and West Virginia allow it, but those states do not have default payments for failure to buy renewable energy credits, so their RPS laws are essentially voluntary and nobody would sell credits there if they can sell them elsewhere. Therefore, most of the incinerators throughout PJM would likely sell their renewable energy credits in Maryland. If this bill passes, incinerators will flood Maryland's RPS, and the RPS won't do its job of encouraging the development of new renewable energy.

