

March 31, 2021

Honorable President Joseph R. Biden and
Honorable Vice President Kamala Harris
The White House
Washington, DC

We, the undersigned 65 organizations and 90 individuals, congratulate you on your election! We are particularly encouraged that you recognize the critical importance of addressing climate change and restoring the use of science in the evaluation of policies and programs that are needed. The US Environmental Protection Agency has long documented the significant connections between wasting and climate change. Our linear system of materials extraction, processing, consumption, and disposal in landfills and incinerators is intimately tied to core contributors of global climate change such as industrial energy use, transportation, and deforestation. Waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting reduce the impacts of this one way, linear and non-circular flow of materials. As waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting replace wasting, environmental gains are complemented by economic ones: new jobs, a retrained workforce, new small businesses, revitalized manufacturing and an expanded tax base for local government.

We are calling on the Administration to incorporate these goals into its policies and programs of all relevant departments, including: Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Emergency Management, Energy, Environmental Protection, Health & Human Services, Interior, and Labor. To achieve a worldwide culture that sustains the planet, we encourage you to establish policies and programs to address these important goals. Responses to new challenges such as pandemics, natural disasters, and weather-related emergencies should not create barriers to move towards a just world of vibrant, resilient, Zero Waste communities, in harmony with nature.

Goals for Waste Reduction, Reuse, Recycling and Composting

1. **STOP TRASHING THE CLIMATE:** Adopt a [Zero Waste](#) approach – via redesign, reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting – which is one of the quickest and most effective strategies to protect the climate, while also addressing racial and environmental justice, and creating thousands of jobs throughout the country. [Wasting directly impacts climate change](#) because it is directly linked to global resource extraction, transportation, processing, and manufacturing. When we minimize waste, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions in sectors that together represent ~40-50% of all U.S. greenhouse gas

emissions. Decision-makers and environmental leaders should reject climate protection agreements that support landfills, incinerators or plastic-to-fuel chemical recycling.

2. **CENTER EQUITY:** Design federal policies and programs to support the concerns and efforts of frontline communities and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). Create a just and inclusive system for a sustainable and regenerative future, while advocating for policies and practices that ensure human safety, equitable access to resources and opportunities, and elimination of toxins and pollution that negatively impact ecological and community health. Create pathways for emerging jobs through certified training. All investments should prioritize support for communities that historically have been harmed “first and worst” by waste systems (communities of color, Indigenous communities, and low-income communities).

3. **REDESIGN:** Require manufacturers to minimize and eliminate hazards and redesign products for highest material and energy efficiency and a closed circle economy, focusing services and products to embody durability, repairability, reuse, with recycling and/or composting as a final option, in that order. Waste less in the future through right-sizing and better design.

4. **BAN WASTEFUL PRODUCTS:** Direct EPA and other appropriate federal agencies to support and implement product bans for products that are demonstrated to be wasteful by design, or contaminate recycling or composting programs, or are problematic in the environment and to human health.

5. **MAKE PRODUCERS RESPONSIBLE:** Require companies to eliminate the hazards their products pose to the environment and human health throughout the entire life cycle of the product, from resource extraction to final disposition. Producers should be held financially responsible for remedies of their products’ impacts including: health care costs for workers and communities impacted, environmental clean-up and funds to reimburse cities and counties to support and expand local management of discards, reuse, recycling and composting infrastructure. Producers should be financially responsible to expand existing and establish new beverage container deposit programs. There needs to be fiscal responsibility, but not necessarily physical responsibility. Producer control over materials can lead to corporate concentration at the expense of local decision-making and a diverse local economy.

6. **REDUCE AND SEPARATE AT THE SOURCE:** After redesign, collect all discarded materials and products separated at the source and further sort them into higher quality fractions for reuse, recycling, or composting, with nothing left out and nothing left over.

7. **KEEP COMPOSTABLE ORGANICS OUT OF LANDFILLS AND INCINERATORS NOW:** Compost or digest organic materials to make and use compost and mulch to reduce greenhouse gases and sequester carbon. Support and implement incentives, penalties, or controls to prevent organic materials, particularly food discards and yard trimmings from

being disposed of in landfills and incinerators. Diverting these biodegradable materials from landfills and incinerators to be composted or anaerobically digested would eliminate upwards of 10% of greenhouse emissions.

8. **SUPPORT AND EXPAND REPAIR, REUSE AND RESCUE:** Support existing reuse and repair organizations and infrastructure and expand opportunities for reuse and repair through outreach and education, promotion, and investment. Establish and support programs to rescue edible food for people and animals.

9. **BUILD ZERO WASTE INFRASTRUCTURE:** Invest in Zero Waste infrastructure, including [resource recovery parks](#), to safely salvage usable items and parts and handle all discards as resources to be conserved and recovered. To maintain robust and self-sustaining recycling markets in North America, increase the purchase of products with recycled content by the public and private sector. Support infrastructure investment [recommendations](#) submitted to Congress to reduce plastic pollution. Policy incentives should be directed to revitalize local economies by supporting environmentally just, community-based and controlled green materials recovery jobs and businesses. Support these investments with training programs that establish high standards for professionals intended to address the needs of a broad range of industry, government and nongovernmental organization jobs.

10. **END WELFARE FOR WASTING:** End subsidies for resource extraction and support choosing recovered materials first for manufacturing, including eliminating subsidies for fossil fuel extraction. There are many national and state subsidies for wasting, from landfill operation subsidies to “renewable energy” subsidies. Without those subsidies, reuse, recycling and composting would prevail in the marketplace. Landfill subsidies that need to be eliminated include: (i) weak financial assurance rules for long term liabilities, as they are currently insufficient, (ii) permitting side slopes that are too steep to be stabilized, (iii) allowing leachate lines too long to clean out, and (iv) gas collection systems that do not work when most of the gas is generated. Incentives such as the Renewable Electricity Production Tax Credit and Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards should not be provided for landfills or incinerators. Subsidies to extractive industries such as mining, logging, and drilling should be eliminated. Instead, subsidies should support industries that conserve and safely reuse, recycle or compost discarded materials.

11. **LEVY FEES AND SURCHARGES:** Adopt fees and surcharges on wasteful products, landfills and incinerators: Many European nations have adopted significant landfilling fees of \$20 to \$40 per ton that are used to fund recycling programs and decrease greenhouse gases. In the U.S., a number of states as well as local governments have adopted disposal surcharges (for example, [New Jersey](#) and [Pennsylvania](#) at the state level and [Alameda County](#) and [San Jose, California](#), at the local level). Several cities have passed product fees such as the [District of Columbia’s 5 cent fee on plastic shopping bags](#). Surcharges on unnecessary packaging and products and on incineration and landfilling not only counterbalance the negative environmental and human health costs

of those systems that are borne by the public, but also level the playing field and provide needed infrastructure funds for safer and more sustainable alternatives.

12. RETIRE EXISTING INCINERATORS AND STOP NEW FACILITIES: Eliminate investments in incineration and landfilling to free up taxpayer money for resource conservation, efficiency, and renewable energy solutions. Retire existing incinerators and halt construction of new incinerators and landfills: The use of incinerators (also known as mass-burn, pyrolysis, plasma, and gasification facilities), and landfills obstruct efforts to reduce waste and recover materials.

Thank you for your leadership in these important areas. We welcome the opportunity to talk with members of your Administration about these recommendations. Please contact Neil Seldman, Institute for Local Self-Reliance at nseldman@ilsr.org or Richard Anthony, Zero Waste USA at ricanthonya@aol.com.

Sincerely,

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Cc: John Kerry, U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
Gina McCarthy, White House National Climate Advisor
Ambassador Susan Rice, Director of the Domestic Policy Council
Brian Deese, Director of the National Economic Council
Lloyd J. Austin III, Secretary of Defense
Michael S. Regan, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce
Jennifer Granholm, Secretary of Energy
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Barry Breen, Acting Assistant Administrator, USEPA Office of Land and Emergency Management

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Also Signed by:

Organizations

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3. Seneca Lake Guardian
4. Bob Gedert, President, National Recycling Coalition
5. Todd Sutton, Waste Sleuth & Associates
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7. Barbara Klipp, Executive Director, Midwest Sustainability Group
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11. Humanist Chaplaincy at American University
12. Filbert Street Garden
13. Craig Coker, Principal, Coker Composting & Consulting
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15. Cornell Waste Management Institute
16. CERO Cooperative
17. Tom Gilbert, Black Dirt Farm LLC
18. Christine Datz-Romero, Executive Director, Les Ecology Center
19. Earth Stew Compost Services, LLC
20. Chris Weiss, DC Environmental Network
21. The Compost Co-operative, Inc.
22. Zero Waste Action - Sonoma County, Portia Sinnott, Executive Director
23. Mother Earth Foundation
24. J. Elizabeth Bauer, Board Chair, Envision Frederick County, Inc.
25. Common Ground Compost
26. The Kauai Women's Caucus
27. Takoma Alliance for Local Living Economy/Takoma Park Mobilization
28. Center for Zero Waste Design
29. Montgomery County Food Council
30. Kali Rabaut, Owner, Suncoast Compost
31. FoodPLUS Detroit
32. Waukesha County Environmental Action League
33. Natural Organic Process Enterprises
34. US Composting Council
35. Compost Crusader LLC

36. Compost Manufacturing Alliance
37. Corbin Compost
38. Eco-Cycle
39. Brad Weikel, Founder, Little Green Bucket
40. O-Town Compost Inc.
41. Compost Cab
42. Compost Technical Services
43. Nick Shaw, Owner, Apex Organix Compost
44. Vokashi, Inc.
45. Plate to Plant, Community Compost Coalition
46. OffBeet Compost
47. John Cline, Co-owner, New Earth Farm/Composting
48. Sunshine Community Compost
49. Terry Craghead, Worker-Owner, Fertile Ground Cooperative
50. Nicola Krebill, worker/owner, Schmelly's Dirt Farm
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63. Matthew M. Civello and Wendy Frank, Manhattan Solid Waste Advisory Board

Individuals

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