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Waste-to-Energy is a Clean, Renewable Energy Source
Recent report is highly flawed and contradicted by Federal, State and International Agencies

A recent report from the Environmental Integrity Project (EIP) took shots at the waste-to-energy industry, but missed the mark when it failed to understand the science behind facilities that generate renewable energy from household trash. An unbiased evaluation would have drawn several conclusions that the report failed to make. First, waste-to-energy is widely used and recognized by federal, state and international agencies as a safe, proven, renewable energy source that meets stringent environmental standards. Second, localities, states, and countries that have the highest reliance on waste-to-energy also generally have the highest recycling rates. Third, the International Panel on Climate Change and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have determined that waste-to-energy is a net reducer of greenhouse gases.

The EIP analysis did not consider all of the information readily available in the public domain and in the process arrived at incorrect conclusions. The report made generalizations based on a comparison of waste-to-energy emissions for select pollutants with only a very few, hand-picked, best performing coal units. To draw conclusions about how waste-to-energy performs against coal plants generally based on this selective analysis is irresponsible and misleading. In addition, the EIP report does not include all aspects of the environmental impacts of coal generated electricity and ignores the environmental impact associated with the mining and transportation of coal. A life cycle analysis would show that waste-to-energy facilities have fewer emissions than coal-fired power plants.

“Waste-to-energy is a sustainable waste management tool and a renewable energy generator with a proven track record worldwide,” said Ted Michaels, President of the Energy Recovery Council, which is the national trade association representing companies and local governments engaged in the waste-to-energy sector. “This report is an illustration of an organization playing fast and loose with data to arrive at a predetermined conclusion. The fact remains that policy makers at all levels of government, domestic and international, have recognized waste-to-energy as an important source of renewable energy that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

Earlier this year, Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley signed into law legislation that would place waste-to-energy on equal footing with other renewables such as landfill gas, biomass, and chicken litter. Enactment of this legislation puts into place a policy that will drive investment of renewable waste-to-energy technology in Maryland. This puts

Maryland on par with the most environmentally progressive nations in Europe which rely heavily on recycling in conjunction with waste-to-energy. Maryland already powers more than 100,000 homes through the waste-to-energy process, which provides much needed baseload power around the clock. With the proper policies in place, such as those enacted this year in Maryland, much more energy can be generated from a fuel source that would otherwise be driven out of state for disposal.

Michaels added, “Energy is too scarce, waste is too abundant, and jobs are too precious to ignore the benefits of waste-to-energy. The EIP report is intended to obfuscate the issues and does so by drawing inaccurate conclusions. It is disappointing that the EIP’s commitment to intellectual integrity falls short of their self-stated interest in environmental integrity.”

Scientific studies show that modern waste-to-energy facilities that are operated in accordance with state and federal regulations are safe. Human population studies indicate that modern waste-to-energy facilities do not adversely affect the health of communities in which they are located. In addition, risk assessments have been conducted for specific facilities to calculate the likelihood of adverse impacts from emissions. These risk assessments show that waste-to-energy facility emissions are well within, or lower than, the guidelines set by the U.S. EPA and state environmental agencies for protection of public health. Studies have also been conducted to determine whether measurable impacts to the environment occur in areas surrounding waste-to-energy facilities. Overall, the conclusions of these studies have found that modern waste-to-energy facilities are not associated with adverse impacts to either public health or the environment.

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