



## Stop Incinerators - North America

## 2009 in Review

2009 was a busy year for folks fighting incinerators across the US and Canada, with quite a few notable victories! Below is a review of the year, including industry threats, policy debates and community victories. Please take a moment to reflect, be inspired and celebrate, as we all regroup for the year ahead. Let us know if you have any corrections or additions. Also, please feel free to post this to your respective websites, if useful.

### **Continuing Threats – Waste to Energy, Incinerators in Disguise & Renewable Energy Subsidies**

The incinerator industry stepped up efforts to expand across US & Canada last year. We witnessed a high-profile Waste to Energy (WTE) campaign target federal lawmakers, local governments and media with the message that burning garbage (and biomass) constitutes Renewable Energy.

The success of the WTE campaign is based on three duplicitous marketing strategies:

1. Spinning the biogenic carbon loophole. In absence of a broad awareness about the links between forest, soil and atmospheric carbon, the industry has (mis) used the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) carbon accounting protocols to support their claim that, since carbon cannot be double-counted, energy generation using biogenic fuels such as waste and biomass is “carbon neutral”. While such claims directly contradict [IPCC guidelines](#) and are refuted by [science](#), industry has been gaining from their spin.
2. The burner folks have targeted communities that are economically depressed and in dire needs of employment - with the promise of jobs. Despite the fact that [Zero Waste](#) practices such as [recycling produce many more jobs](#) for far less cost, it's evident we need to share this knowledge more widely.
3. Misleading the public with claims that their new technologies pose **no threat** to the public. Many companies continue to point to unacceptable emissions tests as evidence - such as company tests at non-commercial test facilities. Meanwhile, waste incineration remains a leading source of U.S. dioxin emissions. For more weaknesses behind the claims of staged incinerator companies, see [An Industry Blowing Smoke](#), the 2009 report was jointly released by GAIA, Greenaction, Toxics Action Center, Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, Clean Water Action, Energy Justice Network, Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice, and California Communities Against Toxics. More resources on false industry claims are available at [Greenaction](#), [GAIA](#), and [BREDL](#).

### **US Federal Policy Arena**

Despite the flawed logic behind this marketing pitch, industry lobbyists succeeded in having WTE incinerators, biomass burning and landfill gas to energy projects included in the federal Renewable Electricity Standard (RES) that passed in the [House American Clean Energy and Security Act](#). Senate versions of this bill have also listed landfill gas projects as eligible for “offset credits” under the “cap and trade” regime, and kept the door open for waste incinerators to access such incentives as well.

On a visit to DC, where GAIA, [Energy Justice Network](#) and other allies met with members of Congress to try and force WTE, landfill gas and biomass subsidies out of the federal climate bill, we quickly learnt that the “[Covanta Family](#)” had been on the Hill far ahead of us, meeting and briefing all the key Senate and House committees. While this news gave us a sense of futility in our efforts to fight industry lobby groups in DC, it also underscored the need for us to develop stronger alliances and common strategies with other activist networks and groups, including those in the House of Labor.

On this note, GAIA’s recent collaboration with the [International Brotherhood of Teamsters](#) to shift federal subsidies away from burning and burying and towards recycling jobs gave birth to the [Recycling Works! campaign](#). The campaign started out with signing on over 140 local, state and national groups onto a [federal policy platform](#), and succeeded in inserting language on [State Recycling provisions](#) (as a climate and green jobs strategy) in the Boxer – Kerry climate bill last fall. This was a noteworthy precedent, regardless of the fact that the (failed) bill also contained some of the worst subsidies for WTE, landfill gas and biomass. Recent word from DC is that there is growing interest in a new effort to produce an energy and jobs bill that would likely include such subsidies as well.

### **Emerging Threat: EPA definition of solid waste could create thousands of new incinerators**

Before leaving office, the Bush administration put forward a definition of non-hazardous "solid waste" that exempted existing facilities burning tires, sludge, spent solvents, waste coal and other wastes, from being subject to Clean Air Act emission standards for incinerators, provided that these facilities recover energy from the combustion. This EPA loophole could expose thousands of communities across the country to toxic emissions from existing industrial, commercial facilities such as over 170,000 boilers around the country. This loophole would also allow such facilities to avoid siting regulations required for incinerators. This year the EPA will decide whether to accept this waste definition or issue a more protective one. [Earth Justice and other allies have launched a petition campaign](#) to get the EPA to close this massive [environmental justice](#) threat.

### **New Incinerator Proposals**

Despite a number of proposals being stopped in recent years, 2009 saw more new incinerator proposals, including traditional mass burners in [Maryland](#), [South Carolina](#), [Illinois](#) and [Georgia](#), with expansion plans for a number of existing burners in other states. However, the vast majority of these new proposals have been next-generation technologies that have jumped on the WTE bandwagon, marketing staged incineration technologies such as [gasification](#), [pyrolysis](#) and [plasma arc](#) to a number of communities, like the following in [California](#) and [Louisiana](#). The much-hyped St Lucie County, Florida incinerator proposal appeared to be a sunken project in 2009, although early in 2010 [is attempting to rear its head again](#). There have also been a number of plans to [convert coal thermal power plants](#) to waste and biomass incineration, such as the [Honua gasification plant](#) in Hawaii.

[Biomass incineration](#) companies have deployed similar strategies - targeting states heavily dependent on a depressed forest industry sector, such as Massachusetts, Washington, Oregon, and plantation forestry states in the U.S. Southeast.

In Canada, the westernmost province of British Columbia saw a massive resurgence of interest in waste incineration, with [six new proposals around the Metro Vancouver region alone](#). This interest has been fuelled by a few factors:

- Conservative governments looking to invest in silver bullet energy solutions such as WTE
- A forest industry in severe decline with tens of thousands of union jobs on the line; and,
- The decline of a massive landfill that services the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD), coupled with a provincial ban on waste exports.

The good news is that communities have been organizing, fighting back and winning!

## **Communities Fight Back & Win**

Despite the proliferation of WTE, a number of municipalities, counties and states have rejected new proposals, including staged incinerator technologies. Instead of burning garbage, a number of these communities are [implementing Zero Waste programs](#) to reduce, reuse and recycle garbage and prevent its generation through [Extended Producer Responsibility](#) (EPR) policies. In addition, some cities including Los Angeles and San Jose, California are also pursuing the more environmentally friendly technology of [anaerobic digestion](#) for organic wastes.

Early in the year, [Austin became the first city in Texas](#) to adopt a Zero Waste plan. [The Central Texas Zero Waste Alliance](#) – a grassroots coalition, helped Austin form it's ZW vision.

A number of such community-based groups and allies converged at the [“Zero Waste Communities”](#) conference in Detroit – hosted by a city-wide coalition that has since adopted the name [Zero Waste Detroit](#). Members of ZW Detroit were instrumental in the creation of Detroit's first curbside recycling program, and are working towards having their Mayor end the tenure of one of the [world's largest garbage incinerators](#), in favor of clean air and green jobs. In mid 2009 the Detroit incinerator contract was renewed for one year, and all eyes are on Detroit when this contract is up for review at the end of next June (just a few days after the [2010 U.S. Social Forum](#) convenes in Detroit!)

In June 2009, the [City of Los Angeles Department of Sanitation](#) released a report on their effort to site “zero waste conversion technology” facilities. The report rejected a plasma arc and a pyrolysis proposal and provided a strong indictment of specific staged incinerator companies. However, the report also makes clear that the city will continue to explore a new mass-burn incinerator (there are already two burners in the area).

Also in California, [Greenaction for Environmental Health & Justice](#) and allied, local Environmental Justice groups [forced a plasma arc proposal out of Sacramento](#). More recently Greenaction worked with the farm-worker community of [Kettleman City](#), which has an abnormally high birth defect and infant mortality rate, to force [Waste Management](#) to [abandon its plans to dump radioactive waste](#) at their hazardous waste facility there. The campaign also [secured a commitment from Governor Schwarzenegger](#) to commence a full-scale EPA investigation into the community health impacts from toxic waste and industries.

[Covanta](#) - the world's largest incinerator company, tried to, unsuccessfully, [overturn a Minnesota state law](#) that bars incinerators from burning more than 1000 tons per day. This effort was derailed through excellent organizing by groups like [Neighbors Against the Burner](#).

Environmental justice activists in Texas were successful in [thwarting Veolia's attempt](#) to import 20,000 tons of toxic PCBs from Mexico to burn in its toxic waste incinerator in [Port Arthur, TX](#).

[Community organizers in Frederick County, MD](#) have continued their inspiring work to raise [zero waste awareness](#) in their state while opposing a large Mass Burner proposal by Waste Management subsidiary – [Wheelabrator](#). Their efforts were rewarded when the County Commissioners voted to reject a mass burn incinerator proposal, first in [April](#) (which was later reversed) and again in [October](#). It's been a tug of war in Frederick County, and community organizers are sure to win the final round!

Even communities relatively new to waste/incinerator issues, have challenged corporate burners with considerable success. Early in the year, community activists in Anderson, Indiana fended off an incinerator proposal with savvy online organizing and public outreach. The community organized a [phenomenal turnout at a public hearing](#) that forced local officials to side with their constituents.

In [Kamloops, British Columbia](#) community activists successfully organized their town council to unanimously reject a proposal to gasify creosote-laden railway ties, and are now getting local Members of Parliament to stand up and oppose incineration. This local win also marked the launch of the [Zero Waste BC](#) Network that has emerged as a province-wide effort to challenge the incinerator scourge there. It is worth noting that ZW BC has had support from veteran activists Helen Spiegelman of [Zero Waste Vancouver](#), and [Paul Connett](#). In confronting the incinerator lobby, ZWBC uncovered that one of the industry experts brought in to testify had previously served [the tobacco industry lobby](#).

In Eastern Canada, residents of Durham Ontario [continue to oppose](#) Covanta's Durham-York mass burn incinerator proposal. If approved, Covanta proposes to export both bottom and fly ash to New York State, while still calling incineration a "local" disposal solution. For a list of communities fighting new incinerator proposals and promoting ZW in Canada, check out [Prevent Cancer Now](#).

On the biomass incineration front, a number of our allies in Massachusetts rallied a formidable public opposition to biomass incineration – their [statewide campaign](#) continues to gather momentum. Their efforts have gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures to oppose the use of State forests for fuel, and end both state and federal subsidies for biomass burning. Similar efforts have been germinated across the country – most recently in the state of [Washington](#), where there is pending legislation aimed at providing access to State forests for biomass fuel.

Also in the Northeast - [Rhode Island decided not to lift a 15-year ban](#) on waste incineration and rejected new incinerator proposals being pushed by Covanta. [Clean Water Action](#) and other allies in Rhode Island played a major role in ensuring this decision. The state's decision was largely attributed to the massive cost of garbage burning that local communities have had to bear.

Perhaps the biggest victory of 2009 came late in the year, as the eyes of the world were focused on the [UN Climate negotiations in Copenhagen](#). In early December, Governor Deval Patrick announced that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would not only retain their [moratorium on building new incinerators](#) (including gasification and C&D waste), but would also prioritize zero waste strategies such as EPR, reduction and recycling while moving away from incinerators and landfills. This announcement came after many months of public and behind-the-scenes work by Don't Waste Massachusetts - a new statewide alliance of 35 organizations.

Now that we are well into 2010 and sizing up all the corporate polluters we need to kick out of our communities, it's worth the pause to reflect on all this great organizing work that happened last year.

For my part, I want to thank all of you amazing folks for the great work you do and the time you dedicate to organizing your own communities, and helping those of others. I look forward to more collaboration amongst our network – knowing we have the collective ability to put an end to the burn.

Peace,

Ananda

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