



Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee (TPMEC)

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Committee: House Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB 0438 - "Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards -- Eligible Sources"

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 20, 2020

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing our testimony today. The Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee (TPMEC), a grassroots organization of over 200 members and a member of two state-wide coalitions (Maryland Climate Coalition and the Earth Coalition) and the Montgomery County 80 x 27 Coalition (a county-wide group focused on aiding the county achieving its goal of reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2027).

TPMEC strongly urges you to support the proposed Act to remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards for three reasons: 1) burning trash is not clean; 2) burning trash is not healthy; and 3) the incinerators should not be subsidized by the lungs and lives of Marylanders.

Burning Trash is *Dirtier* Than Coal

Burning trash is not clean energy: to produce the same amount of energy, trash incinerators emit more greenhouse gases than coal plants do. Trash incinerators are the dirtiest way to make electricity by most air pollution measures. Even with air pollution control equipment in place, trash incinerators emit more pollution than (largely uncontrolled) coal power plants per unit of energy produced.

To produce the same amount of energy as coal power plants in Maryland, the Montgomery County incinerator -- operated by Covanta -- releases 15% more fine particulate matter, 60% more arsenic, 68% more greenhouse

gasses, and 94% more nitrogen oxide (which triggers asthma), 3.5 times the amount of chromium, 11 times more lead, 21 times more cadmium, 26 times more mercury, and 50 times more hydrochloric acid.¹ Incinerators release 3.1 times the amount of mercury as landfills.²

Covanta claims that the pollution created by incinerators has decreased dramatically in the past ten years; however, as Covanta has admitted, the industry-wide reductions are not primarily from the installation of pollution controls on some existing facilities. In fact, most of the reduction is due to incinerators closing down.³

Similarly, the pollution controls for our Maryland incinerators do not compare favorably to other facilities in the United States. Both Wheelabrator in Baltimore and Covanta in Dickerson would be illegal to operate if they were built today. Wheelabrator emits 150 ppm of nitrogen oxide and the Dickerson plant emits 85-90 ppm, compared to the facility in West Palm Beach, Florida that emits 45 ppm. Any new incinerator must meet the 45 ppm standard.

Covanta also claims that it has a “rigorous stack testing program performed by a regulator-approved third party.” However, Covanta chooses and hires its own testing company. The testing companies know that if they show results that are unfavorable to their clients, they may not be hired again. Even some “regulator-approved third party” testing labs have been caught for falsifying data. Some incinerators are allowed to test only one boiler each year, and to pick which one they test, as is the case for the Wheelabrator Baltimore trash incinerator. It’s not unusual that if an incinerator stack test shows a high level of pollutants, for it to be tested again until there is a more acceptable result. State regulatory agencies allow averaging of multiple test results to get an acceptable passing result.⁴ The result is that the emissions averaging does not accurately reflect the pollution burden on the surrounding community. For example, the Wheelabrator incinerator in Baltimore is a principal source of much of the city’s pollution. In 2017, it was reported to be 82 percent of the sulfur dioxide and 64 percent of the nitrogen oxides emitted by smokestacks within the city limits.⁵

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2017 National Emissions Inventory, and EPA’s 2016 eGRID database, and Energy Information Administration’s Form 923.

² *Ibid.*

³ www.energyjustice.net

⁴ See, e.g., “Tulsa Matter, Covanta’s 2019 10-K SEC filing for FY 2018, p.104.

⁵ <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/environment/bs-md-trash-incineration-20171107-story.html>

Incinerators Are Not Healthy

Health data studied in Baltimore strongly supports that incinerators sicken Marylanders. In December 2017, the Abell Foundation, in conjunction with the Environmental Integrity Project, published a study entitled “Asthma and Air Pollution in Baltimore City.” The study found that Baltimore’s asthma rate is three times greater than the rest of Maryland and that the highest incidence of asthma occurred in those zip codes that are adjacent to major emitters of air pollution: 21230, in which the Wheelabrator incinerator is located, and 21226, in which has other major facilities are located. The Wheelabrator incinerator is the single largest stationary source of Nitrogen oxide in Baltimore. The plant emitted 1,141 tons of nitrogen oxide in 2016, making it the state’s fifth largest emitter of that pollutant. The Wheelabrator incinerator is also a major source of sulfur dioxide and other toxic air pollutants. According to the Baltimore City Health Department, the average life expectancies for babies born to families in Cherry Hill, Curtis Bay and Brooklyn are all less than 70, a decade less than the statewide average. In Westport, residents are more than twice as likely to die of lung cancer than those in the Guilford or Homeland neighborhoods of North Baltimore. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation estimated that the facility's emissions cost Maryland \$21.8 million in health care expenses annually, and \$55 million overall in annual health expenses.⁶

Similarly, the Dickerson trash incinerator is the single largest industrial emitter of air pollutants in Montgomery County. This facility produces approximately 740 tons of air pollutants and sends 180,000 tons of toxic ash to landfills in Virginia.

Marylanders’ Health Should Not Subsidize Incinerators

In Baltimore, Montgomery County, and throughout the state of Maryland, trash incineration contributes to air pollution that harms residents’ health; those residents should not be required to subsidize this pollution through the Renewable Portfolio Standard.

For these reasons, we urge you to support HB 0438 and remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards.

⁶ Ibid.

