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Committee: Environment and Transportation
Testimony on: HB 179 “Maryland Recycling Act - Recyclable Materials and Resource Recovery Facilities - Alterations”
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 11, 2020

The Maryland Sierra Club supports HB 179, a bill that excludes incinerator ash as “recyclable materials” under the Maryland Recycling Act (MRA). The bill also repeals the authority of a county (including Baltimore city) to rely on trash incinerator ash to help meet its state-mandated waste reduction targets as part of its recycling plan.

Incinerator ash is the leftover material resulting from the burning of municipal solid waste. The MRA currently allows ash that’s incorporated into cement blocks to count towards the MRA rate reported by local governments.¹ We believe this is completely inconsistent with the definition and practice of recycling in the 21st century:

- Incinerators burn many recyclable materials (metals and food waste, for example) that could be separated, composted, or processed, and then subsequently marketed as raw materials or products. The Zero Waste International Alliance considers discarded material to be a resource for “reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.”² Incinerator ash is a product that will never be part of a sustainable cycle and should not be considered “recyclable.”
- Incinerator ash contains toxins known to be harmful to the environment and human health. Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) and dioxin are common contaminants created when waste is incinerated³; incentivizing “recycling” of incinerator ash encourages the persistence of these toxins in the environment, endangering human and animal life.
- Trash incinerators emit climate-disrupting greenhouse gases which damage our climate, and other pollutants which damage Marylanders’ health.

Trash incinerators are expensive, polluting, and an appalling waste of resources. Our trash should be redirected to create jobs by growing recycling markets and creating circular economies. Eliminating incinerator ash from the MRA list of “recyclable materials” is a first step in the right direction. We urge the Committee to favorably report this bill.

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¹ <https://www.garrettcountry.org/solid-waste-recycling/garrett-county-recycling-program/maryland-recycling-act-definitions>.

² <http://zwia.org/zero-waste-definition/>.

³ https://ipen.org/sites/default/files/documents/After_incineration_the_toxic_ash_problem_2015.pdf.

Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization. The Maryland Chapter has over 70,000 members and supporters, and the Sierra Club nationwide has approximately 800,000 members.