



Committee: Economic Matters
Testimony on: HB 0220, Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard - Eligible Sources - Alterations (Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2025)
Position: Support
Hearing Date: February 20, 2025

The Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 220, the Reclaim Renewable Energy Act of 2025. This bill will remove incineration of municipal solid waste (trash) from Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), removing an unwarranted subsidy and moving the state towards its goals of truly clean, renewable energy.

Electricity generation from trash incineration is a significant source of air pollution, water pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. The RPS was created to incentivize clean renewable energy and help Maryland transition away from polluting technologies. Trash incineration is neither clean nor renewable, and incentivizing this polluting technology is inconsistent with state goals and a waste of ratepayer dollars.

Trash incineration is not clean or renewable – it emits climate-disrupting carbon dioxide and other pollutants that cause serious damage to Marylanders' health. Incineration facilities typically emit more carbon dioxide, dioxin, mercury, nitrogen oxide, and lead than fossil fuel plants. Their residual ash contains high concentrations of harmful toxins including dioxin, mercury, lead, and other heavy metals; these high concentrations can rapidly leach into local soil and water.

The trash incinerator in downtown Baltimore is one of the largest sources of air pollution in the city, producing about a third of all industrial air pollution in Baltimore. It emits a substantial amount of mercury and lead – both known to be critical threats to children's neurological development. It is also the city's single largest source of pollutants that cause respiratory disease, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides (NOx). Sulfur dioxide causes acute respiratory irritation, triggering immediate worsening for anyone with an underlying pulmonary disorder, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Nitrogen oxides contribute to childhood asthma and are the major source of ground-level ozone (smog) formations that trigger asthma attacks.

The RPS should be focused on accelerating the deployment of new, clean renewable energy facilities. Both trash incinerators in Maryland, which currently receive incentives through the RPS, began operations well before the RPS's first compliance year, 2006. The Covanta incinerator in Dickerson, Maryland began commercial operation in 1995, and the Wheelabrator incinerator in downtown Baltimore began operation in the 1980s. Maryland's RPS dollars also have been supporting a Covanta incinerator in Fairfax County, Virginia, which began commercial operations in 1990. Subsidizing polluting facilities that existed before the RPS was created does not advance the goals of Maryland or serve its residents.

Continued investment in trash incineration is not in line with Maryland's climate or clean energy goals. With the passage of the Climate Solutions Now Act, Maryland committed to an

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ambitious goal of reducing greenhouse gases by 60% by the year 2031. The 2023 Maryland Climate Action Plan and Governor Moore's June 2024 Executive Order both reiterated the state's movement towards clean energy, articulating a goal of 100% clean renewable electricity generation by 2035. In a year with heightened attention to the state budget and ratepayer impacts, the state should also look towards opportunities, like HB 220, to realign existing incentives with state policies and goals. The fiscal note also notes that HB 220 will have a minimal impact on ratepayers.

The Sierra Club has long advocated that state policy should not incentivize any type of combustion. Removing trash incineration from the RPS is a critical step towards Maryland's long-term clean energy goals.

For these reasons, the Maryland Sierra Club urges a favorable report on HB 220.

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