



Montgomery County Incinerator Update: 9/18

The Incinerator Is a Top Polluter - The 22-year old Montgomery County trash incinerator is the largest polluter in the County – more than the coal-fired power plant. The incinerator burns an average of about 570,000 tons of trash per year, turning it into 390,000 tons of air pollution and 180,000 tons of toxic ash that is dumped in Virginia landfills.

The Incinerator Pollutes Our Soil - Toxins such as dioxins, furans and mercury are released daily over Montgomery County. It is also the number one industrial source of greenhouse gases in the County.

The Incinerator is Old and Hazardous to Operate - This past year has seen several major uncontrolled fires at the incinerator. It is in poor shape and maintenance has been neglected.

Healthier Alternatives to Incineration Exist - In the quarter century since the incinerator opened, tremendous strides have been made in alternative ways to manage waste. A growing number of counties and cities across the country have switched to other means of waste removal, reuse and disposal. Some are achieving rates of 85% or higher for recycling and reuse, with a resultant sharp reduction in the burning or landfilling of waste.

The Contract with the Incinerator Operator Expires Soon - The contract between the County and the incinerator operator will expire in 2021. There is no reason to renew the contract when a feasible and more economical alternative to burning waste exists.

The incinerator is hazardous to the health of Montgomery County families. It is hazardous to our farms, forests, and streams. It is an old, antiquated method for handling waste. The incinerator needs to be shut down. The time to pursue the closure of the facility is now.

What You Can Do Now

1) Pass a Clean Air Ordinance That Monitors Pollution

Montgomery County can create stricter standards for emissions (i.e. greater restrictions on what harmful chemicals and elements can come out of a smokestack) than those required by Federal law. Hans Riemer offered to sponsor this ordinance but has not moved it in several months. He is currently Council President. He sets the agenda.

2) Stop Allowing Incinerators to be Defined as a Renewable Source of Energy on the State Level

We are the only state in the country that considers burning trash a Tier 1 form of “renewable energy” and thus allows operators to receive subsidies from the state operations. Bills to change this were pulled in spring 2018 because of a powerful block by the head of the Senate Finance Committee. He was just voted out of office so we now need to **push our State representatives like Brian Feldman to support legislation that removes incineration from the ‘clean energy’ categorization in the Maryland Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS).**

3) Implement a Zero Waste Strategy for Montgomery County

“Zero Waste” means designing and managing products and processes to significantly reduce the volume and toxicity of waste, conserve and recover resources, and not burn or bury them. The goal is to get as close to zero as possible, even if that means landfilling some of our waste while we work towards reducing what cannot initially be recycled. This is much safer for our residents than polluting the air we breathe by burning.

A recent Montgomery County study found that of the materials currently being incinerated at the Dickerson incinerator, 34% is food waste, 22% is paper and 18% is plastic. If just these were removed from the waste stream, we would eliminate the need for the incinerator.

A white paper commissioned by Sugarloaf Citizens Association definitively lays out a Zero Waste plan that is economically and technically feasible for Montgomery County without incineration. The paper identifies safe and well maintained private landfills available in unpopulated areas of Virginia that are assessible by clean and inexpensive rail. These could be used as an interim measure for the small amount of trash that is truly unrecyclable. This plan would dramatically reduce greenhouse gases, toxic emissions and create jobs for our citizens.

In May 2018, The Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection awarded a half a million dollar contract to HDR Consultants and created a Zero Waste Task Force to develop a long range plan for waste management but they did not ask them for a plan that finds an alternative to incineration of our ‘throw aways’. ***Unless we as citizens insist now that they plan for waste management WITHOUT incineration we will still be breathing burned trash for decades to come.***