



June 10, 2008

Letter to the Editor:

Several opposition groups issued a report last week entitled “Stop Trashing the Climate,” which unjustifiably concludes that waste-to-energy in some way contributes to climate change. In their quest for “zero waste”, these groups have lost sight of the big picture and have circulated factually incorrect information about waste-to-energy. I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

First, waste-to-energy is a net reducer of greenhouse gas emissions. Research by EPA and others have shown that for each ton of trash processed at a waste-to-energy facility approximately one ton of carbon dioxide equivalents is avoided. When communities use waste-to-energy, they avoid methane that would have been generated if the waste was landfilled; they avoid carbon dioxide that would have been emitted if the power was generated by conventional sources; and they avoid further greenhouse gas emissions through the recycling of recovered metals from the trash at the facility.

Second, waste-to-energy facilities employ sophisticated emission control technologies, which allow them to surpass EPA’s maximum achievable control technology standards. The environmental track record of waste-to-energy led EPA to conclude that waste-to-energy produces electricity “with less environmental impact than almost any other source of electricity.”

Third, on average, communities that utilize waste-to-energy have higher recycling rates than the national average. The report wants readers to believe that if you close waste-to-energy plants and landfills then people will have no alternatives but to produce zero waste. That is like suggesting that if you close all the hospitals, then people would have no alternative but to stay healthy.

Fourth, the report is inconsistent with the European experience, which has achieved the world’s highest recycling rates by either banning or severely restricting landfill use and using waste-to-energy to manage whatever cannot be recycled. In fact, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2007 report endorses an integrated waste management approach for mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions. IPCC specifically labels post-consumer waste as a significant source of renewable energy, the energy value of which can be maximized through waste-to-energy.

In the energy and climate conscious world in which we live, let’s not turn a blind eye toward waste-to-energy—an advanced technology that avoids greenhouse gas emissions, generates much needed electricity, avoids the use of fossil fuels, and recycles metals that cannot be collected on the curbside. The energy produced by the nation’s 87 waste-to-

energy plants each year is the energy equivalent of 30 million barrels of oil. In an era of high gasoline prices, it would simply be wasteful not to rely on waste-to-energy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ted Michaels". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Ted Michaels  
President