

Date: Thu, 09 Jul 2015 4:10am

To: (Frazier Blaylock, Covanta; DC Councilmember Mary Cheh)

From: (Mike Ewall, Energy Justice Network)

Subject: Re: Response to Opposition Regarding Fairfax Waste-to-Energy Contract

Cc: (Other DC Council members and staff; DC Mayor's Office; DC Department of the Environment)

Dear Councilmember Cheh:

We find it interesting that Covanta's response was drafted, not by Mr. Blaylock, but by James F. Regan, their Communications Director with PR experience in crisis management. He questions the motives of environmental and public health and civil rights non-profits, who have no financial stake or conflict of interest in the issue at all, while Covanta has a \$36-78 million dollar stake in the outcome of this contract.

While we provide extensive documentation (see <http://www.energyjustice.net/dc/wastecontract>), they provide not a single link or footnote, and fail to refute any specific facts we've put forward.

Their claims are easily refuted, and there are many, so I'll cover a few here and am available for questions on any of the rest.

**Cost:** Covanta claims that they're competitive with landfills in the area. Fact is that every single bid in 2004 and 2009 for hauling DC's waste to a landfill came in cheaper than Covanta, according to multiple accounts by former DPW Director Howland (including before your committee). See: <http://www.energyjustice.net/files/dc/Howland-incineration-more-expensive.pdf> However, landfills were not even allowed to compete in the RFP that resulted in the proposed Covanta contract. If Covanta is so competitive, why was their (cheaper) competition not allowed to compete?

The incinerator industry's own trade association president testified before your committee in 2013 and stated, on video, that "Waste-to-energy is an additional capital cost. That is not in dispute, compared to a landfill... compared to a landfill, which is a less capital-intense structure – it is more expensive. If you had a landfill next to a waste-to-energy facility, then almost in every case, you would think the landfill is going to be cheaper." See: <http://www.energyjustice.net/incineration/expensive-waste>

**Incinerators vs. Landfills:** As environmentalists, we abhor landfills, but recognize that incinerating waste before landfilling the toxic ash is even worse. Organizationally, we have helped stop many landfills, as have some of the other groups who are [urging council](#) to oppose the Covanta contract. We're not fans of landfills. However... no matter how you cut it, **the end of the pipe is still a landfill**. The only question is whether our waste goes straight to a landfill, or through an incinerator or digester first. Incinerators still send their ash to landfills, as Covanta readily admits.

It's clear (and backed up with government and industry data), that:

- \* incineration before landfilling is the [most polluting and expensive](#) of the options,
- \* direct landfilling is bad, but preferable to incineration, and
- \* digestion before landfilling is the [best option](#), economically and environmentally.

We're not ready to do the digestion option yet, but with proper leadership could be there in a time frame shorter than this contract. This is a good reason not to lock ourselves into the most expensive and polluting option for 5-11 years.

Of course, all of this is about the back end, after reducing/reusing/recycling/composting all we can with a strong [zero waste](#) plan, as your [legislation](#) passed last summer calls for. Such a plan would create about [10 times](#) as many jobs as the disposal options do.

**Covanta is a major polluter in our region:** As Breathe DC pointed out, Covanta's home state of New Jersey specifically barred the Covanta Fairfax incinerator from selling renewable energy credits into NJ's renewable energy mandate because the incinerator fails to meet NJ's requirements for nitrogen oxide (NOx) pollution and ash testing -- even though other trash incinerators in NJ, PA and MD qualify. See: [http://www.njcleanenergy.com/files/file/Renewable\\_Programs/6-18-14-8B.pdf](http://www.njcleanenergy.com/files/file/Renewable_Programs/6-18-14-8B.pdf)

It's convenient that Covanta tries to minimize their emissions by comparing to the entire state of Virginia, which has [over a dozen](#) coal power plants. However, the closest of them is 42 miles away from the District; the rest are 100-315 miles away... not quite as relevant as comparing to pollution sources within 20 miles of the District as we did. However, if you compare Covanta's nitrogen oxide pollution to the average for coal plants in Virginia, you find that Covanta's emissions rate is 45% higher than the average coal power plant, according to the latest EPA [eGRID](#) data.

It's clear, from EPA data, that Covanta Fairfax is a large polluter in our region. Here's where they stand on several key pollutants:

**Covanta Fairfax Pollution Stats:**

[All data from EPA [National Emissions Inventory](#) (NEI) -- latest data, from [2011](#), or [2008](#) data where specified.]

**Nitrogen Oxides (NOx): 3,225,520 lbs in 2011**

- [#2 within 20 miles of DC](#)
- #2 in Northern Virginia, second only to Dulles Airport (National Airport is #3, and Covanta's Alexandria incinerator is #4)
- #1 in Fairfax County
- #14 in all of Virginia in 2011; 17th in 2008
- #2 in the entire trash incinerator industry in the U.S. Of 87 facilities, their NOx emissions are second only to the incinerator in Detroit (which Covanta ran for a time), which is 2nd largest in the nation and operates without any NOx emissions controls. Their emissions are even higher than the largest trash incinerator in the nation, which Covanta runs in Chester, PA without any

pollution controls to remove NOx. The Covanta Fairfax incinerator in Lorton is the 4th largest in the nation and has pollution controls to remove NOx. (NEI 2008 and 2011)

**Hydrofluoric Acid / Hydrogen Fluoride (HF): 5,084 lbs in 2008**

- #1 in entire industry: they're 22% of the collective emissions from the 19 incinerators reporting in 2008
- their HF emissions aren't listed in NEI 2011, but their 2008 levels are far higher than the highest source in 2011; if their 2011 emissions were same as their 2008 emissions, they'd be responsible for nearly half (48%) of the emissions from the 15 incinerators reporting in 2011

**Mercury: 18.11 lbs in 2011**

- #1 within 20 miles of DC
- #1 in the county (99.4% of the total)
- #1 in all of Northern Virginia (all other sources combined are 2.07 lbs); Covanta Alexandria/Arlington is #2 at 1.46 lbs

**Lead: 58 lbs in 2011; 88.6 lbs in 2008**

- #5 within 20 miles of DC
- #2 in Fairfax county, after the sludge incinerator; the sludge incinerator is 87% of county total and Covanta is 12.4%
- (the sludge incinerator is #3 source of lead in Northern Virginia)

**Sulfur Dioxide (SO2): 180,570 lbs in 2011**

- #4 within 20 miles of DC; Covanta Alexandria/Arlington is #5
- #1 in Fairfax county; 88% of the county total
- #5 in Northern Virginia; Covanta Alexandria/Arlington is #10

**Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs): 23,764 lbs in 2011**

- #3 in Fairfax county
- #9 in entire industry, out of 85 incinerators reporting

Sincerely,

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At 06:12 PM 7/8/2015, Blaylock,Frazier wrote:

Council Member Cheh,

I am writing regarding the statements made in the DC Environmental Group's letter that was sent to you and your colleagues yesterday afternoon. This document contains manipulated numbers, false claims and does not consider all of the information readily available in the public domain.

Beyond the incomplete and skewed analysis – it is surprising to see a group advocating landfilling where energy recovery is minimal, and emissions of the potent greenhouse gas methane are a known problem (over 80 times stronger than CO2 over 20 years). Landfills are the third largest source of manmade methane in the U.S. Energy-from-waste facilities, like Fairfax, help alleviate this problem, reducing GHG emissions, on average, by one ton for every ton of waste diverted from landfilling. Despite their best efforts, landfills only capture a fraction of landfill gas which is known to include not only methane, but Title III air toxics and both known and probable carcinogens. One must question their true motives and financial backing when they are advocating landfilling.

Energy-from-Waste (EfW) facilities such as Covanta Fairfax provide sustainable, safe waste disposal that complements recycling, produce clean, reliable energy and steam and reduce greenhouse gases.

- Covanta EfW facilities recycle over 500,000 tons of ferrous and non-ferrous metal annually – the equivalent amount of steel that would be used to build 5 Golden Gate Bridges and in the production of over 1B aluminum beverage cans
- Covanta EfW facilities produce renewable electricity for more than 1 million homes and 9 billion pounds of steam
- Covanta EfW facilities are net reducers of greenhouse gases
  - o Offset methane from landfills and fossil fuel power plants
  - o Recycling metal and avoiding emissions from the long-distance transport of waste

### **Health and Environmental Impact**

In regards to health risk impact, Covanta EfW facilities like Covanta Fairfax operate well below state and federal emissions limits. Those limits are more stringent than those in place during original permitting where ambient impacts were demonstrated to comply with standards protective of human health and the environment. In fact, Covanta Fairfax operates 12-97% below federal standards for parameters such as mercury, NOX, dioxin, SO2, PM, and acid gases (HCl). The NOX emissions from the facility are only 2.7% of the state's NOX emissions from point sources. This excludes motor vehicles which emit over half of all NOx emitted nationally.

Health risks for energy from waste facilities have been demonstrated to be extremely low. For example, based on its research, the U.K. Health Protection Agency concluded that the negative health impacts associated with well-regulated EfW facilities are likely to be very small, if even detectable. Closer to home, a recent health risk assessment performed for the Montgomery County facility in Maryland found a very low chance (i.e., less than 1 chance in 1 million) for occurrence of potential carcinogenic health effects, and no expectation of noncarcinogenic

health effects as a result of facility emissions.

According to U.S. EPA researchers, the emissions from the production of electricity from landfill gas are greater per unit of energy produced than for Energy-from-Waste facilities – AND - electricity from EfW is “cleaner” than coal and oil fired electricity generating units.

Today’s waste to energy facilities contribute **less than one-tenth of 1% of total dioxin emissions in the U.S.** as reported in the U.S. EPA’s latest data.

## **Ash**

Energy-from-Waste reduces the volume of waste by about 90%, resulting in a 90% decrease in the amount of land required for disposal. Ferrous and non-ferrous metals are removed from the ash for recycling, leaving a residue that looks a lot like cement.

That residue or ash is then safely disposed of or reused. Ash from Fairfax is tested regularly to ensure it is non-hazardous. Years of testing ash from every Energy-from-Waste facility in the country has confirmed that it is non-hazardous.

Residual ash leftover from the combustion process is routinely reused as daily cover at local landfills across the country. It exhibits concrete-like properties causing it to harden once it is placed and compacted in a landfill.

If permitted, EfW bottom ash could be used in a variety of applications such as roadways and construction as European Union countries have done for many years. In fact, Pasco County, FL is currently piloting a program that will use ash as aggregate for roadways.

## **Cost**

Disposal of MSW at Energy-from-Waste facilities is competitive with landfills in the regions where Covanta operates.

## **Covanta’s track record**

We have an excellent environmental track record, and we are proud of it. Our facilities operate 24/7 and we strive for outstanding environmental performance, continuous improvement and compliance 100 percent of the time. On the very rare instances where we were not, we have acted immediately to correct the situation, assessed what happened and applied those findings to ensure it does not happen again. There has never been an instance where anyone in the community has been at risk.

## **Environmental Justice**

Covanta is committed to engaging with and supporting the communities where we operate. To help fulfill this commitment and ensure all communities have a fair and just opportunity to participate in the decision making process in matters impacting local environments, Covanta maintains a community outreach and environmental justice policy to support engagement with local communities, to reduce discharges and minimize emissions and to do this in a manner which ensures meaningful community involvement.

For decades, Covanta has been on the cutting edge of technological innovation for continuous

improvement and a steady proponent of employing best practices to ensure we are the best neighbor we can be. Over the past six-plus years we have voluntarily cut emissions of dioxin, mercury and hydrogen chloride by 50%.

We are looking forward to having the Council vote on the contract at your June 14<sup>th</sup> meeting next week.

Best regards,  
Frazier Blaylock

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