Governor Edmund Gerald Brown  
State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814  

June 27, 2016  

Re: Opposition to Efforts to Increase Garbage Incineration in California  

Dear Governor Brown,  

We write to you today concerned that the state of California appears to be embarking on an effort to push for the incineration of garbage. High ranking members of the Governor’s Administration seem to be advocating for the use of incineration to solve our state’s waste issues instead of moving forward on policies to aggressively increase recycling rates and embrace producer responsibility as solutions which protect communities, the climate, and encourage job creation.  

At a ceremony in San Francisco this past April, the 2016 Goldman Environmental Prize was awarded to Destiny Watford for defeating an incinerator proposal in her hometown of Baltimore, Maryland. She realized the negative impacts incineration would pose to the health and environment of her community, and was driven to action.¹ Because of her work, the Maryland Secretary of the Environment recently acknowledged that environmental justice is “one of the fundamentally most difficult and biggest challenges” of incineration.²  

Additionally, in 2014 nine previous Goldman Environmental Prize recipients released a statement to the state of California in response to the announcement of a CalRecycle workshop on “waste-to-energy” (which was later postponed). The attached statement concludes: "We urge you to reconsider your approach and reject incineration, not only because zero waste alternatives will be better for California’s air, economy, health, and environment, but also because of the example California sets for other places in the world."  

Californians have opposed repeated efforts to site these incineration facilities in their communities. Gasification and plasma arc facility proposals have targeted the low-income, Spanish-speaking Latino communities of Watsonville and Gonzales, and the working class community of Red Bluff. This industry has a track record of failed proposals in California (as well as around the United States) due to false claims about emissions and the allegedly “proven” nature of the technology. The operational and emissions problems at a test facility in Romoland prevented the facility from obtaining air pollution permits. These incinerator technologies are simply not worthy of consideration by the state of California as a waste solution.  

Yet the University of California, Berkeley Law – Center for Law, Energy & the Environment published a report in May 2016 entitled “Wasting Opportunities: How to Maximize the Environmental & Clean Energy Benefits of Municipal Solid Waste Energy Recovery.” The report puts forward recommendations for the state to expand the use of “waste-to-energy” technologies to address residual waste.  

The “waste-to-energy” incineration technologies referred to in the report include waste combustion, gasification, and plasma which are inherently energy intensive, polluting, and expensive. Many of the so-called "conversion technologies" proposed in California over the past decade have been notable for false and exaggerated claims and the targeting of communities of color and low-income and working class communities.  

Despite this recent experience in California, it seems that the convening that led to this report did not include critics with the most on-the-ground experience with these approaches, nor did it include environmental justice communities on the frontlines of incineration in the state of California, such as near the state’s three existing incinerators or where incineration has been proposed in recent years. However, it did include members of the Governor’s staff and incinerator companies.  

INCINERATION-LIKE SCHEMES ARE NOT THE WAY FORWARD

“Waste conversion” facilities, including both “mass burn” and “gasification” incinerators, are the most toxic, expensive, and climate-polluting energy industries in the U.S. These facilities are predominantly sited and built in low-income, communities of color across the country, burdening these communities with mercury, dioxins and particulate matter while undermining investments for local economic resilience and job creation. California’s three existing incinerators in Stanislaus County, Long Beach, and Commerce have long attempted to create financial life-lines to sustain their exorbitant and polluting practices. Falsey marketing their technologies as “green” has been a key strategy of the waste combustion industry in attempts to access hundreds of millions of dollars in tax breaks and incentives from policy mechanisms such as the Renewable Portfolio Standards.

“Waste conversion” technologies such as gasification, pyrolysis, and plasma incinerators are carbon-intensive and prone to toxic pollution. For example, two gasification incinerators in the United Kingdom were recently exposed for excessive dioxin emissions violations, one of these facilities was forced to shut down by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, and a separate pyrolysis facility faced serious operational problems.

Because these technologies produce such a small amount of energy, they are both the most expensive means of waste disposal and energy generation. According to 2013 U.S. Energy Information Administration data, the operating costs of waste incinerators are over ten times that of coal power plants, and the capital costs are twice that of nuclear. No cities in California need such an excessive additional and unnecessary financial burden.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF “RESIDUAL” WASTE

This UC report sets out to address the problem of “residual” waste pollution, yet tackles the problem from the wrong angle. Waste “residuals” are often comprised of items that are actually reusable, recyclable or compostable, but were not sorted properly, or products and packaging that do not fit into most of the recycling and composting programs. Instead of burning or burying these products, these residual wastes can be reduced through greater education, outreach, and enforcement of recycling and composting separation, as well as greater awareness about product redesign.

The issue of non-recyclable and non-compostable products and packaging is one that must be addressed by manufacturers. As California’s cities succeed at recovering higher rates of recyclables and food waste, the problem of irresponsibly designed products and packaging will become more and more apparent. Manufacturers must minimize materials in products and packaging, and design recyclable, compostable, and reusable products and packaging.

As the Goldman Prize winners indicated, California is looked to as a thought leader in advancing the principles and practice of zero waste. Governments from around the world travel to California to learn about the state’s leading practices in reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting. The recommendations to burn our waste, pollute our air, and place our most vulnerable communities further at risk are a major step backward, and if adopted would weaken California’s role as a leader in zero waste.

Our organizations urge the state of California to seek better, more equitable, and just strategies for reducing waste.

Sincerely,


NY Department of Conservation, Comments to New York State Public Service Commission in the Matter of the application of Covanta Energy Corporation. 19 August 2011


Organizations in California

Action Now
Mitzi Schpak
Director
Pasadena, CA

American Veterans (AMVETS)
Chaplin Anthony Quezada
Director
Long Beach, CA 90810

Apostolic Faith Center
Pastor Alfred Carrillo
Wilmington, CA 90744

Asamblea de Gonzales
Roberta Camacho, Treasurer
Gonzales, CA

Association of Irritated Residents
Tom Frantz
President
Wasco, CA

California Communities Against Toxics
Jane Williams
Executive Director
Rosamond, CA

California Environmental Justice Coalition
Thomas Helme
Coordinator/Advocate

California Kids IAQ
Drew Wood
Executive Director
Wilmington, CA 90744

Jena Price
Legislative Affairs Manager
California League of Conservation Voters
Sacramento, Ca 95814

California Safe Schools
Robina Suwol
Executive Director
Toluca Lake, CA

Center for Community Health and Environmental Justice
Penny Newman
Executive Director
Riverside, CA

Central California Asthma Collaborative
Kevin Hamilton
CEO

Fresno, CA
Central California Environmental Justice Network
Nayamin Martinez
Coordinator

Clean Water Action, California
Miriam Gordon
California Director
Oakland, CA

Clean Water and Air Matter
Renee Nelson
President
Kern County, CA

Coalition for a Safe Environment
Jesse Marquez
Executive Director
Wilmington, CA

Comite Civico del Valle
Luis Olmedo, Humberto Lugo
Executive Director
Brawley, CA

Community Dreams
Ricardo Pulido
Executive Director
Wilmington, CA 90744

Del Amo Action Committee
Cynthia Medina
Torrance, CA

Desert Citizens Against Pollution
Lyle Talbot
Director
Lancaster, CA

Desert Protection Society
Donna Charpied
Desert Center, CA

East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
Taylor Thomas
Research and Policy Analyst
Commerce, CA
Ecology Center
Martin Bourque, MA
Executive Director
Berkeley, CA

El Monte Residents Against Pollution
Joe Blackburn
Director
El Monte, CA

El Pueblo Para el Aire y Agua Limpia
Maricela Mares Alatorre
Kettleman City, CA

EMERGE
Magali Sanchez-Hall, MPH
Executive Director
Wilmington, CA 90744

EndOil/Communities for Clean Ports
Gisele Fong
Executive Director
Long Beach, CA

Environmental Health Trust – West Coast Working Group
Antoinette Stein
Deputy Director of West Coast Operations

5 Gyres
Anna Cummins
Santa Monica, CA

Food Empowerment Project
Lauren Ornelas
Founder, Executive Director
Cotati, CA

Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA)
Monica Wilson
US & Canada Director
Berkeley, CA

Global Recycling Council (of the California Resource Recovery Association)
Ted Ward
Co-Chair

Grassroots Recycling Network
Ruth Abbe
President

Grayson Neighborhood Council
John Mataka
President
Grayson, CA

Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice
Bradley Angel
Executive Director
San Francisco, CA

Idle No More SF Bay
Pennie Opal Plant
Cofounder
San Pablo, CA

Long Beach Alliance for Childhood Asthma
Sylvia Betencourt
Director
Long Beach, CA

Los Angeles Environmental Justice Network
Cynthia Babich
Rosamond, CA

Mothers of East Los Angeles
Teresa Marquez
Boyle Heights, CA

Movement Generation
Gopal Dayaneni
Staff Collective Member
Oakland, CA

NAACP, San Pedro-Wilmington Branch # 1069
Joe R. Gatlin
Vice President
San Pedro, CA 90731

Pacoima Beautiful
Veronica Padilla-Campos
Executive Director
Pacoima, CA

Philippine Action Group for the Environment (PAGE)
Fe P. Koons
President
Carson, CA

Physicians for Social Responsibility
Martha Arguello
Los Angeles, CA

Plastic Pollution Coalition
Diana Cohen
CEO & Co-Founder
Santa Monica, CA

Pro Uno
Felipe Aguirre
Director
Maywood, CA
Rooted in Resilience
Nahal Ghoghaie
Resilient Communities Initiative Associate
Berkeley, CA

Shore Up Marin
Terrie Green, Douglas Mundo, Hannah Doress
Marin City, CA

Society for Positive Action, Inc.
Shabaka Heru
Director

Surfrider Foundation
Angela Howe, Esq.
Legal Director

Tri-County Watchdogs
Katherine King
Secretary

Tri-Valley CAREs
Marylia Kelley
Executive Director
Livermore, CA

Valley Improvement Projects
Bianca Lopez
Director/Advocate
Modesto, CA

Organizations and individuals in other regions
(Including organizations in incinerator-impacted communities)

Apollo Kauai
Sustainable Energy Policy
Pam Burrell, Laurel Brier co-chairs
Hawaii

Black Mesa Water Coalition
Jihan Gearon
Executive Director
Black Mesa, AZ

Breathe Easy Susquehanna County
Rebecca Roter
Chairperson
Susquehanna County, PA

Citizens’ Environmental Coalition
Jim Travers
Treasurer
Albany, NY

Citizens for a Safe Environment, INC.
Karen Buck
President
Toronto, ON

Coalition of Anti Incineration Organizations
Myrna Conty
General Coordinator
Puerto Rico

Don’t Waste Arizona
Stephen Brittle
President
Phoenix, AZ

Durham Environment Watch
Kerry Meydam, Founder
Ontario, Canada

East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC)
William Copeland
Director
Detroit, MI

West Berkeley Alliance for Clean Air and Safe Jobs
Janice Schroeder
Core Member
Berkeley, CA

Wilmington Improvement Network
Anabell Romero Chavez
Board Member
Wilmington, CA 90744

Deborah Bell Holt (Love and Respect Youth Foundation)
Los Angeles, CA

Gary Liss (President, Gary Liss + Associates)

Mari Taruc (Board Chair, Filipino/American Coalition for Environmental Solidarity - FACES)
Eureka Recycling
Alex Danovitch
Minneapolis, MN

Green Delaware
Alan Muller
Executive Director
Port Penn, DE

Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Neil Seldman
President
Washington, DC

Ironbound Community Corporation
Molly Greenberg
Environmental Justice Policy Manager
Newark, NJ

Jamesville Positive Action Committee
Vicki Baker
Chair
Jamesville, NY

Kentucky Environmental Foundation
Craig Williams
Program Director
Berea, KY

Little Village Environmental Justice Organization
Juliana Pino
Policy Director
Chicago, IL

Minnesota Public Interest Research Group
Mahyar Sorour
Campus Organizer, Hamline University and St. Catherine University
Minneapolis, MN

Neighbors Against the Burner
Nancy Hone
Founder/coordinator
St. Paul, MN

Nothing Left to Waste
Susan Hubbard
Minneapolis, MN

Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility
Kelly Campbell
Executive Director
Portland, OR

Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter

Neil Carman Ph.D (Former Texas state field investigator of industrial plants and incinerators)
Austin, TX

Southwest Workers’ Union
Arty Trejo
Environmental Justice and Climate Organizer
San Antonio, TX

United Workers
Greg Sawtell
Leadership Organizer
Baltimore, MD

Upstream
Matt Prindville
Executive Director
Rockland, ME

Waste Not!
Don West
Carroll, MD

Zero Waste for Zero Loss
Caroline Eader
Clean Energy & Zero Waste Policy Support and Implementation

Zero Waste Kauai
Sustainable Materials Management
John Harder, president
Pat Gegen, chair
Hawaii

Ana Isabel Baptista (The New School)
Newark, NJ

Ellen Connett
Fluoride Action Network
Office Manager and webmaster
Editor, Waste Not (1986 -2000)

Jeffrey Morris, Ph.D. - Economics
Sound Resource Management Group, Inc.
www.zerowaste.com
Olympia, WA

Mark Lichtenstein
Lichtenstein Consulting; Adjunct Environmental Studies Faculty, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry; and Past-President, National Recycling Coalition
Syracuse, NY

Paul Connett, PHD
American Environmental Health Studies Project Inc
Author, The Zero Waste Solution (Chelsea Green, 2013)

Enclosure: Statement by Goldman Environmental Prize Recipients to California state government on incineration (2014)
Cc: Matthew Rodriguez, CalEPA Secretary
    Scott Smithline, CalRecycle Director
    Arsenio Mataka, Cal/EPA Assistant Secretary for Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs
    Jordan Diamond, Executive Director of UC Berkeley, School of Law’s Center for Law, Energy & the Environment (CLEE)
    Ethan Elkind, UC Berkeley, School of Law CLEE
    Daniel Gergely Szabo, UC Berkeley, School of Law CLEE
Statement by Goldman Environmental Prize Recipients to California State Government on Waste Incineration

April 29, 2014

When we each traveled to California to receive the Goldman Environmental Prize, we learned more about the state’s reputation as an environmental leader. This is why we were especially disappointed to learn that the government of California is considering increasing the dangerous practice of incineration, or so-called “waste to energy,” in the state using mass burn, gasification, plasma, cement kilns, and related incineration approaches. Incineration is neither sustainable nor environmentally sound.

Instead, incineration:
- releases toxic pollution
- endangers public health and the environment,
- violates environmental justice, because these polluting facilities both target and operate in low income and communities of color that continue to be disproportionately impacted by pollution,
- worsens climate change,
- wastes valuable resources,
- undermines recycling, reuse, composting, and waste reduction and the jobs created by these approaches, and
- ensures that we have to continue the unsustainable extraction of additional natural resources to replace those we waste by burning.

Many of us have worked on these critical issues, from stopping the practice of incineration of various waste streams, to working towards responsible zero waste systems and the elimination of hazardous wastes.

As a global community, we need to challenge the idea that products and packaging can be “designed for the dump” or “built to be burned.” Instead of trying to hide the problem of unrecyclable products and packaging by burning the evidence, we urge California to be a trailblazer once again and take up the critical goal of eliminating products and packaging that are not repairable, reusable, recyclable, or compostable. We also urge you to end subsidies for the three existing incinerators in the state, and move toward eliminating the practice of incineration.

We urge you to reconsider your approach and reject incineration, not only because zero waste alternatives will be better for California’s air, economy, health, and environment, but also because of the example California sets for other places in the world. Thank you for your consideration.

Signed by:

Dr. Bobby Peek, groundWork, Friends of the Earth, South Africa, Goldman Environmental Prize 1998

Craig Williams, Chemical Weapons Project, KY Environmental Foundation, USA, Goldman Environmental Prize 2006

Kimberly Wasserman, Little Village Environmental Justice Organization, USA, Goldman Environmental Prize 2013

Nohra Padilla, Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, Colombia, Goldman Environmental Prize 2013

Dr. Olga Speranskaya, Eco-Accord, Russia, Goldman Environmental Prize 2009

Ricardo Navarro, CESTA, El Salvador, Goldman Environmental Prize 1995

Rossano Ercolini, Ambiente e Futuro, Zero Waste Italy, Italy, Goldman Environmental Prize 2013

Von Hernandez, Greenpeace Southeast Asia, Philippines, Goldman Environmental Prize 2003

Yuyun Ismawati, Indonesia Toxics-Free Network, Indonesia, Goldman Environmental Prize 2009