



What you need to know about garbage incineration and the Clean Power Plan

In a important move to tackle climate change, President Obama released the Clean Power Plan on August 3, 2015 to cut carbon emissions from power plants and move toward renewable energy.

What does the Clean Power Plan say about burning waste (incineration)?

- **The good news:** Climate pollution from burning plastics and other non-organic garbage must be counted as causing climate change. There are also some requirements for states that want to burn biomass as part of their plans, read more from [Partnership for Policy Integrity here](#).
- **The bad news:** The Clean Power Plan also says that carbon pollution from burning certain types of garbage (like paper, yard waste, and wood) and biomass do not cause climate change. Calling these “zero emissions” flies in the face of science, which shows that burning waste and biomass releases even higher levels of carbon dioxide than burning coal, per unit of energy.
- **Why does this matter for garbage incinerators? The Plan uses that reasoning to misclassify the burning of organic garbage (or stuff that came from plants) as renewable energy.** But that stuff never gets burned alone – any incentives for burning organic waste would mean more garbage incineration overall.

There are interesting qualifications for states planning to include waste incineration in their plans. First, the electricity capacity must be from 2012 or later, which excludes nearly all existing incinerators, but could lead to new incinerators being built. Second, a state would have to make a plan for increasing waste reduction, reuse, recycling and composting.

Progress towards Environmental Justice in the Clean Power Plan:

Significant improvements in the final plan include a required Environmental Justice Analyses of state implementation plans. See the [Environmental Justice Leadership Forum on Climate Change](#) for more information.



“If states include dirty energy like waste incineration in their state plans, there will be very negative consequences for community health and climate change. Millions of public dollars will be burned up by switching from one dirty energy to another, instead of being invested in real solutions like wind, solar power and recycling.”

- Ahmina Maxey, Zero Waste Detroit Coalition

Why we need to keep incineration out of State Implementation Plans for the Clean Power Plan:

- **Dirty energy:** If state Clean Power Plans treat waste burning as renewable energy or “climate-friendly,” that will encourage highly polluting cement kilns and power plants to burn waste alongside coal and other fossil fuels in order to avoid emission limits and receive climate finance.
- **Climate pollution:** Per kilowatt hour, burning waste releases even more carbon dioxide than burning coal. If state implementation of the Clean Power Plan incentivizes burning waste and wood alongside coal and other fossil fuels, greenhouse gas emissions will go up, and much-needed funds would be taken from community climate initiatives.
- **Public health risks:** Burning waste releases dioxin, lead, mercury, and other toxins that can cause asthma, cancer, and other serious health problems.



"Here in Baltimore, we are experiencing firsthand what happens when we define dirty energy as clean. In Maryland, trash incineration has been classified as renewable just like solar and wind. As a result we were threatened with the construction of the nations' largest trash burning incinerator less than a mile away from our school. It's taking years to undo the damage from this policy. We cannot afford to make the same mistake on the national level with the Clean Power Plan."

- *Destiny Watford for Free Your Voice and United Workers*

Around the country, people are organizing to ensure that State Implementation Plans:

- Do not include incineration.
- Reduce pollution burdens that exist in the most impacted communities.
- Prioritize benefits from real clean energy like wind and solar, while creating jobs.
- Support climate policies that include waste prevention, reuse, recycling, composting, and comprehensive zero waste programs as strategies for reducing climate emissions, conserving energy, and storing carbon in the soil.

GAIA will be releasing a **State Implementation Plan Toolkit** later this summer to support communities organize for clean power and zero waste. To learn more about organizing in your state, contact us! monica@no-burn.org, 510-883-9490 x103.