



Incineration Threat to the Delaware River One Down; More to Come?

Mercer County, NJ planned to build a 1667 ton-per-day municipal waste incinerator just below Trenton in Hamilton Township on Duck Island along the Delaware River. Over the last six months, citizens organized to stop the outdated, expensive and environmentally unacceptable plan. On November 7, 1996 the Mercer County Freeholders changed their direction and voted not to continue with the incinerator. The issues involved in this battle are similar to all municipal waste incineration problems. Outlined below are some of the basic facts and issues we dealt with.

The incinerator was oversized and would depend on trash being hauled in from other counties and private sources (probably New York City and private New Jersey haulers). The weight of the ash produced and that would have to be landfilled would have been about equal to Mercer County's current total raw garbage tonnage. It would have been built primarily with Mercer County bonds, backed by the taxpayers, and then owned and operated by Ogden Martin Systems, Inc.--a "privatized" project that benefits private industry but relies on taxpayers. Environmentally, there are many problems with burning trash. At least 217 organic chemicals are known to exist in the gases or ash from municipal waste incinerators. Air emissions from the proposed incinerator (primarily volatile organic compounds, mercury, lead, and carbon monoxide) would add to existing pollution problems in the region and would be deposited on the River, working into the water column, and taken up by fish. **Existing State fish advisories warn that fish taken from the River at and below Trenton can be hazardous to the health of those who eat them due to mercury, dioxin and other toxic contaminants concentrated in the fish flesh. **Ash residue that will be produced by the burner is a concentrate of everything that was in the trash-- lead, cadmium, dioxin, and other toxic substances (according to a 1987 EPA study). It was to be trucked to Grows Landfill in Bucks County, PA, which discharges its treated leachate into the Delaware River. The ash leaches faster than raw garbage into the environment because it has a greater surface area, threatening more pollution. The burner would not have made money for Mercer County. Virtually all the building blocks that the facility depended on for financial success -- long term contracts with private haulers, a finalized contract with Atlantic County, a contract to sell the energy produced to PSE&G -- were shifting and not controllable.

The future of the solid waste industry in NJ has been totally upset by the Supreme Court outlawing government waste flow control. As a result, no county can know for sure where its waste haulers will take its trash. This is the worst time to invest bonds in a \$260 million municipal trash system, especially if the sources of trash must be secured on a long term basis (20 year commitments were needed for the general obligation bonds). No other NJ county is taking this risk now. As a matter of fact, NJ counties with burners are looking for a State bailout.

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There are alternatives to incineration and wholesale landfilling. Source reduction, re-use, recycling and the recognition of waste as a resource is just the beginning. New, clean and affordable technologies are being developed to recover municipal waste rather than "dispose" of it. The Mercer Freeholders are beginning to develop a solid waste management plan based on real resource recovery that's clean, financially viable, and supported by the public. And there is a movement afoot to shut down all NJ burners!

Riverkeeper would like to investigate all incinerators in the Watershed and is looking for information and intelligence about operating and proposed units. If you have any information to share please contact us at (215) 369-1188