



Environment Committee

Committee: Economic Matters

Testimony on: HB0332 - "Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards -- Eligible Sources"

Organization: Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee

Person

Submitting: Diana Younts, co-chair

Position: Favorable

Hearing Date: February 4, 2021

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of HB0332. We strongly urge you to support the proposed bill to remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards for three reasons: 1) burning trash displaces clean energy in the Renewable Portfolio Standards; 2) burning trash undermines Montgomery County's Climate Action Plan; and 3) burning trash is not clean or healthy.

Incineration is Displacing Clean Energy at an Increasing Rate. A shockingly large and growing percentage of Maryland's renewable "clean energy" comes from high-polluting energy sources. Maryland's percentage of energy from dirty sources (incineration, black liquor, biomass) in the tier 1 Renewable Portfolio Standards *grew from 33% in 2018 to 40% in 2019*. In 2019 alone, Maryland paid over \$32 million to buy renewable energy credits from dirty energy sources. *See Report [here](#)*. As Speaker Adrienne Jones said recently, "climate change is an existential threat" and removing [dirty energy] from the RPS is an "important first step" in addressing it.

Allowing Incineration in the RPS Undermines Montgomery County's Climate Action Plan. Montgomery County has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035. A critical element of achieving that ambitious goal is for it to get its energy from clean, renewable energy sources. Allowing incineration (and other dirty energy sources) in the Renewable Portfolio Standards undermines Montgomery County's Climate Action Plan (as well as Maryland's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act) because dirty energy counts toward clean energy requirements. The subsidies currently going toward trash incineration, if applied to actually clean renewable energy, would have an important impact on

fighting climate change. Instead, we are allowing subsidized dirty energy to take us backwards.

Burning Trash is *Dirtier* Than Coal and is Not Healthy. Burning trash is not clean energy: to produce the same amount of energy, trash incinerators emit more greenhouse gases than coal plants do. Trash incinerators are the dirtiest way to make electricity by most air pollution measures. Even with air pollution control equipment in place, trash incinerators emit more pollution than (largely uncontrolled) coal power plants per unit of energy produced.

To produce the same amount of energy as coal power plants in Maryland, the Montgomery County incinerator -- operated by Covanta -- releases 15% more fine particulate matter, 60% more arsenic, 68% more greenhouse gasses, and 94% more nitrogen oxide (which triggers asthma), 3.5 times the amount of chromium, 11 times more lead, 21 times more cadmium, 26 times more mercury, and 50 times more hydrochloric acid than a coal plant. Incinerators release 3.1 times the amount of mercury as landfills.

Further, health data studied in Baltimore strongly supports that incinerators sicken Marylanders. In December 2017, in a study conducted by the Abell Foundation, found that Baltimore's asthma rate is three times greater than the rest of Maryland and that the highest incidence of asthma occurred in those zip codes that are adjacent to major emitters of air pollution: 21230, in which the Wheelabrator incinerator is located, and 21226, in which other major facilities are located. Similarly, the Dickerson trash incinerator is the single largest industrial emitter of air pollutants in Montgomery County. This facility produces approximately 740 tons of air pollutants and sends 180,000 tons of toxic ash to landfills in Virginia.

Trash incineration contributes to air pollution that harms residents' health; those residents should not be required to subsidize this pollution through the Renewable Portfolio Standards.

For these reasons, we urge you to support HB0332 and remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards.