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**RESOURCE RECYCLING, BIOCYCLE MAGAZINES  
REFUTE NEW YORK TIMES INCINERATION STORY**

**January 20, 2015:** The National section in the *New York Times* on Sunday, January 11, 2015 included an article, “Garbage Incinerators Make Comeback, Kindling Both Garbage and Debate.” The article discussed a recently constructed 3,000 tons/day incinerator in Palm Beach County, Florida, and a proposed, \$1 billion, 4,000 tons/day incinerator in Baltimore, Maryland. Early in the article, *New York Times* reporter Timothy Williams writes: “Americans produce 4.4 pounds of trash per person per day, the most in the world, and the talk of returning to incineration, industry experts say, is an acknowledgement of defeat in the effort to reduce output and step up recycling.”

Ted Michaels, president of the Energy Recovery Council, is quoted as saying, “People said 30 years ago there wouldn’t be a need to have waste-to-energy sites,” after which Williams writes: “Today, few other options are available.”

In response to this article, the two leading industry publications in the recycling and composting industries, *Resource Recycling* and *BioCycle*, are issuing this joint statement, as the article paints an incomplete picture of the state of municipal solid waste (MSW) management in the U.S. in 2015. Excerpts from Williams’ article are followed by facts and figures that tell a more complete story of MSW management.

•“With landfills shunned, recycling programs stalled and the country’s recordsetting trash output unyielding, new waste-to-energy plants are being eyed as a path to salvation.”

Shunned Landfills: Landfills may be “shunned” in terms of being desirable neighbors, but as an MSW management tool, there is more than enough capacity available for the trash being generated in most states and/or their regions, including Florida and Maryland. For example, *BioCycle*’s 2010 *State of Garbage In America* report found that Florida’s neighboring state of Georgia had 572 million cubic yards (228 million tons) of remaining capacity, whereas Maryland’s neighboring states of

Pennsylvania and Virginia had a combined landfill capacity of 514 million cubic yards remaining (over 220,000 million tons). Citing landfills as being “shunned” as a reason that WTE is a path to salvation is misleading. And hauling trash long distance to out-of-state landfills via trains and trucks is a widely used waste management practice.

Stagnating Recycling: Recycling levels in many municipalities may have “stagnated,” but the necessity to recycle paper, metal, glass, plastics and other commodities is critical with increasing stress on natural resources. In 2009, The World Economic Forum released a report, “The Business Case For Sustainability,” which stated that in order to continue manufacturing consumer products for the world’s rapidly growing middle class, recovery of recyclable materials must increase significantly. The problem with locking a municipality’s unsorted MSW into a \$1 billion incinerator is that those valuable commodities are going up in smoke. There is a short-term gain in power production, and a long-term loss in renewable resources.

“WTE as path to salvation”: A more thorough investigation by Williams would have uncovered that very few in the MSW industry — both the public and private sectors — view WTE as a path to salvation. Financing an incinerator requires “locking up” the MSW stream for 20 or more years, pretty much eliminating any opportunity to increase recycling or composting. In short, all collected MSW must be burned to pay the bill. And revenues from selling the electricity produced will likely not contribute significantly to the return on investment.

•“Other residents say they are eager for the plant to be built, in part because Energy Answers has pledged to create jobs ...”

Incinerators Plants Not Significant Job Generators: *Pay Dirt*, a study conducted by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, compared job creation based on composting one million tons of organic wastes (residential, commercial, institutional) versus incinerating or landfilling the equivalent tonnage. Here is the scorecard (total number of jobs): Burning—120; Landfilling—220; Composting—740; Compost Use—620; Total Composting—1,360.

According to the annual Institute for Scrap Recycling Industries handbook, the recycling industry supports almost 463,000 jobs nationwide, generating more than \$87 billion in economic activity.

Numerous reports find that recycling creates and supports, by an order of magnitude of 10-to-20, more jobs than incineration. The recent *More Jobs, Less Pollution* prepared by the Tellus Institute, found that of the 666,000 jobs created by MSW management overall, recycling and composting make up 86 percent of those and landfilling and incineration combined make up just 14 percent.

•*The plant [in Baltimore] will be ... able to combust 4,000 tons of material per day processed from residential garbage, wood, tires and the remains of automobiles.”*

Burning Up Edible Food: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s most recent MSW Facts & Figures data reports that 21.1% of the MSW generated in the U.S. is food waste. Using the 4,000 tons/day number for Baltimore, that is roughly 800 tons/day of food waste that would be combusted. Based on observations from one city’s

commercial food scraps composting program (see “Food Recovery In San Diego,” *BioCycle*, March 2013) it was roughly estimated that 15% of food waste thrown away is still edible. Based on that estimate, about 120 tons/day of what is proposed to be burned in Baltimore could be rescued. Using a U.S. Department of Agriculture conversion of 1.2 lbs of food/meal, that is equivalent to roughly 200,000 meals/day that would be burned instead of consumed. The nonedible portion of the food waste can be composted and/or anaerobically digested, with the by-products used to generate renewable electricity and soil amendments (to grow more food).