



Toronto Citizens are Tricked as Zero Waste Goal Goes Up in Smoke

In 2001 Toronto City Council approved Waste Diversion Task Force 2010, a visionary plan with a laudable preamble: “The reality is that by 2010, every bit of ‘waste’ that Toronto households produce could be recycled, reused or composted.” Around the world Toronto was praised for endorsing the goal of Zero Waste.

But Task Force 2010 advocates zero landfill, *not* Zero Waste. The stated objective is to divert 100% of Toronto’s municipal solid resources from landfill by 2010. Buried in the Report is a very disturbing message: After recycling, reuse and composting, the “residual” waste (as much as 40% of the total waste stream or 480,000 tonnes/year) will be managed with “new and emerging technologies”.

Leading the pack of these technologies is Advanced Thermal Technologies (ATT), which includes gasification and pyrolysis. These technologies superheat mixed residual waste in an oxygen-starved environment to produce a dirty, low-energy synthetic gas that is burned to produce steam and electricity.

However, like incineration, ATT squanders valuable resources, pollutes our air and our water, and creates toxic residues that must be landfilled.

Why Toronto Must Not Invest in Advanced Thermal Technologies (ATT) to Destroy our Municipal Solid Resources

It Is Not Sustainable

Our task in the 21st Century is to recover resources, not destroy them.

According to Dr. Paul Connett, “Even if you made ATT safe, you would never make it sensible. It simply doesn’t make sense to spend enormous amounts of money destroying resources we should be sharing with the future.”

Like incineration, ATT actually wastes energy. Typically, 3 to 5 times more energy is saved when resources are recycled as when they are burned to create electricity.

Like incineration, ATT burns the evidence of bad industrial design. If we can’t reuse it, recycle it or compost it, industry shouldn’t be making it. Industry learns this message faster when they have to take their packaging and toxics back, not when we make them disappear in a “magic machine”.

Building an ATT facility in Toronto will require the investment of an enormous amount of taxpayers’ money in expensive machinery. This money leaves the community instead of creating jobs and small business opportunities.

Like incineration, ATT is *waste management* in the corporate interest, not *resource management* in the local and global interest.

It is Harmful to Human Health and the Environment

Like incineration, ATT:

- Releases toxic metals like mercury, lead and cadmium from plastics, paper and other discarded materials.
- Generates dioxins and furans from chlorine in plastics.
- Requires expensive air pollution control devices to attempt to capture *some* of the extremely toxic emissions.
- Generates highly toxic residues that, ironically, need to be landfilled.

Zero Waste – An Alternative to ATT

Achieving Zero Waste requires a combination of *community responsibility* and *industrial responsibility*.

The community's responsibility is to:

- reduce
- source-separate
- reuse
- repair
- compost
- recycle
- remove toxics

Industry's responsibility is to:

- implement clean production,
- implement extended producer responsibility, and
- implement better industrial design.

Biologically treat the residual

Anything that remains and needs disposal is residual waste (garbage). Residual waste must be screened to remove any remaining recyclables and toxics. Following this screening, everything that is left, including both organic and inorganic material, goes through a composting process to stabilize the organic fraction. This minimizes the production of leachate and methane and eliminates odours. The stabilized waste is placed in an interim waste facility. Prior to adopting this biological solution for their residual waste, the residents of Halifax rejected incineration.

Toronto has already taken gigantic strides in the areas of community responsibility, but by advocating ATT it is throwing in the towel on industrial responsibility.

Achieving Zero Waste by 2010 will not be easy, but it's worth struggling for because it takes us in the right direction!

For more information:

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