




OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

MEMORANDUM

December 3, 2021

TO: Tom Hucker, President
County Council

FROM: Marc Elrich, County Executive 

SUBJECT: Notification for County Council regarding Closing of Incinerator – Environmental and Waste Disposal Infrastructure

I am writing to inform you that we are beginning to take the steps necessary to change the way Montgomery County handles its solid waste and recycling. New innovations in technologies, insights and revived markets for secondary materials have opened opportunities for the County to realize efficient, less polluting and cost-effective ways to better manage these materials. This new approach is both visionary and practical.

We know that the Council is committed to ensuring that the county is managing its waste in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. The end goal is to close the incinerator within the next 12-18 months and to put in place alternatives for processing our waste materials. Having the incinerator has kept the focus on its continued operation and detracted from an incentive to consider innovative approaches used elsewhere.

As the nearby coal power plant reduced its use, then closed for good, the trash incinerator is the county's largest single source industrial air polluter. Other point source emissions of greenhouse gases in the county from large facilities are from facilities operated by the federal government. Even though in aggregate, the solid waste operations contribute a small percentage of total greenhouse gases in the county (buildings and transportation contributing the majority of these gases), these emissions should not be ignored. As we focus on those major sources through the Climate Action Plan, it is important that we also focus on the emissions from our solid waste operations. There is literature showing that emissions from incinerators contribute to asthma attacks and other adverse health impacts.

Additionally, I believe the practice of shipping the incinerator's ash to majority-Black communities in Virginia – currently, a rather populated one near Richmond creates an inequitable situation.

We have engaged in exploring what other jurisdictions here, and abroad, have done to get greater use out

Notification for County Council regarding Closing of Incinerator – Environmental and Waste Disposal Infrastructure

December 3, 2021

Page 2 of 2

of their waste and a higher value from it. Our review has also been informed by the *Beyond Incineration* report prepared by Zero Waste Montgomery County which recommended specific policies and programs that could be put in place to reduce waste. We will use the international definition of Zero Waste and the Zero Waste Hierarchy as our guide to rethink, redesign, and reduce material consumption in Montgomery County, and to seek the highest and best use of discarded materials.

Last week, we celebrated more growth in our commercial food scrap recycling pilot with the addition of the first project at Westfield Montgomery Mall along with the first projects with MCPS. In addition, we began the first day of operating our new residential food scrap recovery pilot in two communities in the County. Our intention here is to expand both programs to the entire County which will allow us to recover a significant amount of the County's waste and convert it to a saleable product – compost.

We have already issued an RFI to solicit proposals from landfills, trucking companies and other companies that could manage the waste as soon as the incinerator is closed - <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/DEP/Procurement/RFI-DEP-RRM-101121.html>. Responses are due in January.

After we receive the responses in late January, we will develop a detailed implementation plan to modify our current solid waste plan with operations and technologies that will replace the incinerator. This plan will be guided by the information from the RFI as well as other information, including gathering and analysis related to elimination of food scraps from the waste stream. The plan will be submitted to the Council for review and approval, and we will then move forward with formal bidding on responses to the RFI for the specific pieces that we will need to assemble. As soon as we have approval and a timeline for implementation, we will provide the Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority and others with the required six-month notification that we will be closing the incinerator.

Our plan is to begin transporting waste to landfills that meet environmental justice criteria, along with bringing our food waste either to a digester or composting facility (or both). I am particularly interested in using anaerobic digestion for the organic residuals in municipal waste as it could open a pathway to hydrogen production for that component of our bus fleet which will use it to generate electricity.

Through cooperation of the executive and legislative branches of government, we can readily improve environmental and waste disposal infrastructure, and be a model for the state and country.

I greatly look forward to working with the County Council to advance the complementary policies and programs to create a new materials management system that will serve the county for generations to come and contribute to a sustainable 21st century.

CC: Adriana Hochberg, Acting Director, Department of Environmental Protection
Marc P. Hansen, County Attorney, Office of the County Attorney