

July 20, 2026

Kyle Daspen
Climate Change Programs and Partnerships Branch
40 St Clair Ave West, 14th Floor
Toronto, ON M4V 1M2

Dear Mr. Daspen:

Re: ERO 026-0595 - renewable energy approvals and waste incineration

We are 14 environmental organizations writing to express our opposition to the proposal to classify waste incinerators in Ontario as “renewable energy” facilities.

It appears to us that this proposal is a false solution to a poorly framed problem. **We oppose definition changes to biomass that would redefine incineration of organics in municipal waste as “renewable energy.”**

Waste is not a renewable resource but rather the undesirable product of a linear economy that externalizes the costs associated with the full lifecycle of products onto municipalities, the public and the environment. The primary purpose of any waste incinerator – including so-called “waste-to-energy” facilities – is not to generate energy but rather to dispose of unwanted waste.

We are well aware that public opposition can make it difficult to establish new or expanded waste disposal facilities in Ontario. Waste disposal in the form of landfill and incineration are polluting and disruptive operations that attract opposition from local communities for good reason.

We are concerned that the outcome of this proposal would be to misrepresent the purpose of planned facilities and fast-track approvals, denying people who live and work near the sites the opportunity to understand and engage on the potential impacts as well as alternatives – including waste reduction and legitimate forms of renewable energy, including wind and solar power.

In fact, this is the opposite of what the provincial government has implemented with regard to the siting of landfills: after amendments to the *Environmental Assessment Act (EAA)* in 2020,¹ municipalities now have a say over the siting of landfills in their jurisdictions. It makes no sense to require municipal support for one type of waste disposal system – landfill – while making it even more difficult for municipalities and their residents to have a say on another form of waste disposal, incineration.

We urge the government to abandon this proposal, which will promote waste generation and undermine sound programs to reduce food waste and manage organic materials such as composting. The provincial government must instead work with other levels of government to reduce the amount of residual and mixed waste that is generated for disposal while supporting the growth of truly renewable energy, notably wind and solar power.

¹ <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-42/session-1/bill-197>

Waste as fuel: a toxic cocktail

The proposal to “recognize” the biogenic component of municipal waste processed by “waste-to-energy” (incineration) facilities as a renewable resource is absurd. Waste incinerators burn mixed residual waste primarily collected from households and businesses. The mix of waste received by a facility depends on the extent to which effective diversion programs are available and sorting has happened – typically at the household or business level – to exclude organics, recyclable materials and hazardous waste. When organic waste is first minimized, by reducing food waste, and effectively sorted, it can indeed be processed as a resource that provides nutrients back to soil and, in some cases, energy from anaerobic digestion.

Biogenic material, meaning anything produced from or through a living organism, is peppered through residual waste that has not been sorted prior to disposal. An alkaline battery is folded into a banana peel, a broken plastic coathanger perforates a torn cotton bedsheet, single-use plastic films and wrappers marinate in rotting meat and vegetables, a broken electrical cord is tangled in trimmed tree branches.

The biogenic material in residual waste is a sign of a poorly-functioning waste reduction and diversion system that contributes to pollution. While Ontario municipalities have increased diversion rates over the last generation through source-separated organics and recycling collection programs, these divertable materials continue to represent the bulk of waste destined for final disposal in landfills and incinerators in Ontario.² This includes food, paper, lawn and garden trimmings, pet waste, wood and packaging materials such as plastic, glass and metal. Industrial, Commercial and Institutional waste in Ontario has much lower diversion rates and therefore even higher proportions of compostable or recyclable material being wasted in landfills or incinerators.³

Organics tossed into residual waste release methane when they break down in a landfill and, because they are wet, can require the addition of fuel such as fossil gas when processed in a waste incinerator in order to achieve the necessary temperature for combustion. Both of these activities generate climate-warming emissions.

Counting organics as a virtue in residual waste will not only reward poor sorting systems and behaviour but could even perversely incentivize the re-diversion of organic waste back into the waste stream. This would result in the increase of greenhouse gas emissions from both the burning and landfilling of organic waste.

² See Canada’s National Waste Characterization Report (2020)
https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2020/ecccc/en14/En14-405-2020-eng.pdf

³

<https://www.amo.on.ca/sites/default/files/assets/DOCUMENTS/Waste/2023/AMO-ON-Baseline-2023-v6-A-ODA.pdf>

Furthermore, burning residual waste – which can be literally anything, including the kitchen sink – generates additional dangerous pollutants that can harm the health of people living nearby and the environment. Waste incinerators emit air pollution that cause lung and heart problems, including nitrous oxides, sulphur dioxide and particulate matter; and toxic heavy metals such as mercury and lead. They also produce and release highly toxic and persistent pollutants including dioxins and furans and forever chemicals (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS) that build up in the environment and living things and can cause cancer and hormone disruption, including infertility.

Municipal waste is not a renewable resource. It reflects product design, consumption and waste-management practices, not ecological regeneration. There is no way of knowing whether the forests, crops or other biological systems exploited to produce the items that generate municipal waste are being renewed faster than they are consumed, which is a key principle in the definition of renewable energy.

The dirty truth about burning waste for energy

Generating electricity from burning municipal waste is, by far, the dirtiest form of electricity generation in Ontario since the closure of coal-fired power plants. An analysis of the City of Toronto's waste options determined that the two existing municipal waste incinerators in Ontario generate ten times more greenhouse gas emissions than existing power sources, including fossil gas-fired power plants.⁴ Shipping and disposing of the city's existing waste mix at the city-owned Greenlane Landfill produces fewer climate-warming emissions than incineration, even if landfilling organics produces methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

The truth is that generating steam and electricity from waste incinerators is a kind of fig leaf used to distract from the toxicity of burning waste. Plastic producers also use it as an excuse to avoid redesigning their products and packaging to reduce waste.

Truly renewable energy, including solar and wind power, is growing more plentiful and affordable and should not be confused with waste disposal.

Subsidizing expensive waste incineration by calling it renewable energy

Waste incineration is expensive, even compared to managing waste in a state-of-the-art landfill. Unfortunately, the proposed government policy would incentivize investment in incineration over diversion, increasing costs and doing nothing to support the most affordable option – which is to reduce waste at source.

Experiences from other jurisdictions shows that the proposed policy could also have the perverse effect of driving further public subsidies to burn waste, including redirecting public funds from truly renewable energy to waste burning. British Columbia has allowed the Burnaby

⁴ https://www.torontoenvironment.org/comparing_the_climate_impacts_of_incineration_vs_landfill

waste incinerator to qualify under the definition of Clean or Renewable Energy,⁵ enabling a contract with BC Hydro for electricity that subsidizes its operations.

Meanwhile, other jurisdictions are eliminating incentives for waste incineration and requiring waste generators to pay the true cost of disposal.

Since 2020, California has eliminated a provision that allowed municipalities to count incineration for up to 10 per cent toward achieving a waste diversion target and introduced a new regulation requiring municipalities to divert organics from both landfills and incinerators. The state also refused to provide renewable energy credits to incineration facilities. As a result, the two remaining municipal waste incinerators in the state announced they were closing.⁶

The European Union has eliminated most funding for waste incinerators and is considering including these facilities in its emissions trading system, aligning with carbon levies and pricing that already exist in a number of European countries.⁷ European policy now favours waste reduction over waste burning.

Waste reduction is key to reducing pollution, emissions and cost

The 2017 *Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario* calls for diverting 80 per cent of Ontario's waste from landfills **and** incinerators by 2050 and for approaches that reduce waste at source.⁸ However, per capita and total waste generation is up by 3 per cent and 7 per cent respectively since 2017, and total waste disposal is up 6 per cent. Diversion is also up, by 9 per cent, due to increases in removing organics – biogenic waste – from the waste stream.⁹

The Strategy contemplates measures to reduce food waste and loss and a ban on organics in landfills and incinerators to boost diversion rates further. These serve to reduce the biogenic portion of the waste disposal stream and related greenhouse gas emissions. The proposal to count incinerated organics as renewable energy flies in the face of this strategy.

As a case study developed for Metro Vancouver demonstrates, the most affordable and sound approach to addressing waste management challenges is to reduce the generation of residual waste at source.¹⁰ The case study found that a zero waste approach would cost less than one-tenth of the cost, per tonne, of waste incineration.

⁵ https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/291_2010

⁶ <https://www.wastedive.com/news/reworld-stanislaus-county-covanta-facility-closure/729174/>

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<https://www.climatechangenews.com/2026/03/19/will-the-eu-finally-make-waste-pay-for-its-growing-carbon-footprint/>

⁸ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/strategy-waste-free-ontario-building-circular-economy>

⁹

<https://www.amo.on.ca/policy/land-use-planning-resources-and-climate-change/amos-baseline-waste-and-recycling-report-and>

¹⁰ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/19oum89-TgC7Ab9-1C1IW2qFyVA7uOjyU/view?usp=sharing>

We therefore urge the government to abandon policy to treat waste as renewable energy and instead:

- Move ahead with Ontario's stalled Food and Organic Waste Framework and Policy statements that require organics diversion and reduction for all sectors to reduce organics in the waste stream.
 - Implement a ban on organics in landfills and incinerators
 - Reduce food loss and waste, including by retailers
 - Implement province-wide organics collection and processing to keep biogenic material out of the disposal stream
- Expand and enforce waste diversion requirements for businesses and the ICI sector to reduce non-food biogenic material in the waste stream
 - Implement long overdue EPR regulations on textiles, compostable packaging, furniture and other biogenic materials
 - Enforce diversion requirements to restore Ontario's diversion rates for construction and demolition waste, including wood waste.
- Reduce single-use plastics, which are a significant source of residual waste, including through reuse and refill infrastructure in key sectors (eg. hospitality, grocery and beverage)
- Support repair and share programs, particularly for textiles, small appliances, tools and electronics
- Expand deposit-return to include non-alcoholic beverage containers
- Strengthen and enforce Ontario's EPR requirements for designated materials, including tires, batteries and packaging with a focus on reduction, reuse and repair, with dedicated funding for reuse and research and development, and high and enforced targets for collection and environmentally-sound management of materials at end of life.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed regulatory changes.

Sincerely:

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