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Here's Why Communities on the East Coast Are Resisting Incineration

February showed mixed signals for the incineration industry with a company's financial successes happening as communities resist these facilities. Covanta, the nation's only publicly-held incinerator company, recently released its annual report with a message of optimism and success. Indeed, the company made \$152 million, or a

166 percentage increase in its profits from the previous year; partially thanks to the 2017 Trump tax cuts. The waste-to-energy firm reported growth in its U.S. segment and viewed the United Kingdom, the Philippines, and parts of Latin America as areas for more growth. In a conversation with investors, CEO Steve Jones noted the firm made "real progress on our strategic initiatives and expect 2019 to be an important year in continuing this momentum." Yet weeks earlier, in Finger Lakes, New York, Circular enerG planned to construct an incinerator at a former Army Depot despite residential opposition. Lawmakers in the state showed they share such constituent concerns after introducing bills that would forbid any incineration construction in the Finger Lakes watershed. Meanwhile, in Baltimore, Maryland, residents blame a facility in an area, the infamous Wheelabrator Baltimore, for unusual number of asthma rates and other respiratory illnesses. Yet officials did not take any action to assure constituents any sense of justice; that is until early February when the City Council passed legislation that would implement strict emissions requirements that would affect the waste-to-energy facility. Contrary to fears, Baltimore Mayor Catherine Pugh did not veto the legislation. In fact, she signed it

and said at a New York City event the city's incinerator would "shut down."



Wheelabrator, Baltimore, MD

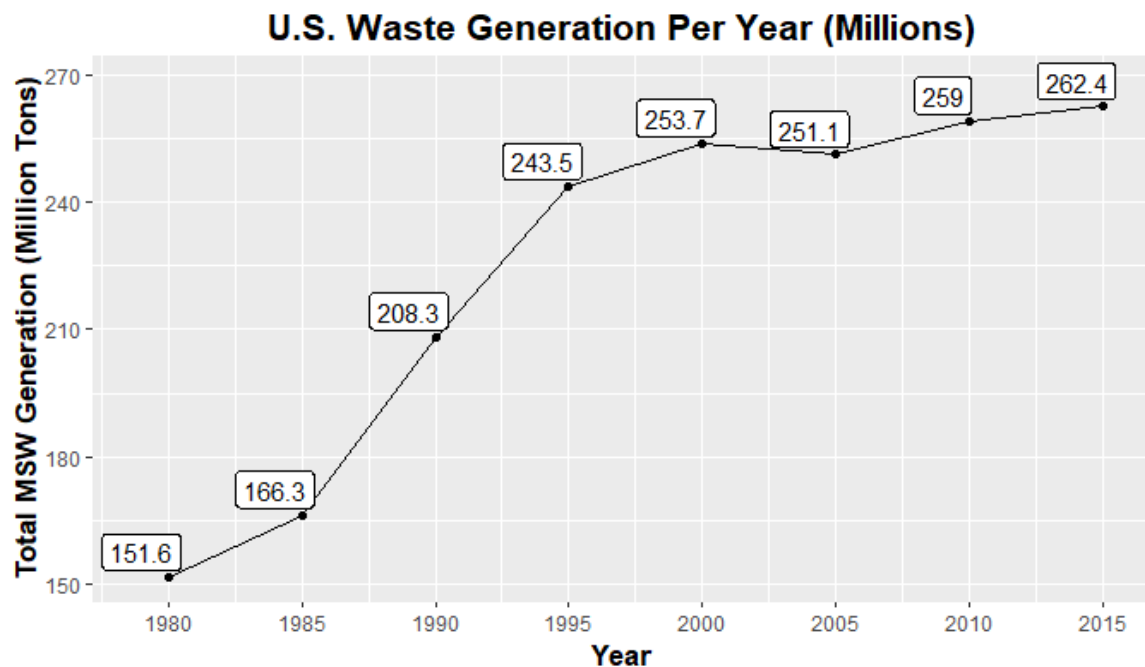
Wheelabrator, the private owner of the facility, was naturally opposed as it warned the bill could result in closure as it would be too expensive for air quality equipment upgrades to comply with the new regulations. The firm was so alarmed by the bill that it hired a lobbyist, specifically a former advisor to a Lieutenant Governor, against the legislation. Yet the company violated the state's lobbying act by not officially registering the person as a lobbyist. This tactic is not new. Lobbyists are an asset for the waste-to-energy industry. Covanta mostly hires former government officials, and its board of directors includes a

former Environmental Protection Agency official. It pays to have governmental knowledge to play the system. Even more comical is how Wheelabrator put the EPA's logo on a mailer defending its technology as suitable for communities. Yet the problem is that the firm illegally put the EPA's logo on this mailer as special permission is needed for such an act. Both the EPA's Office of General Counsel and the Maryland Office of Attorney General were notified of this. How could all this be happening while the country's top waste-to-energy company makes significant profit? To understand this, it is important to navigate the country's waste management system.



Durham York Energy Center

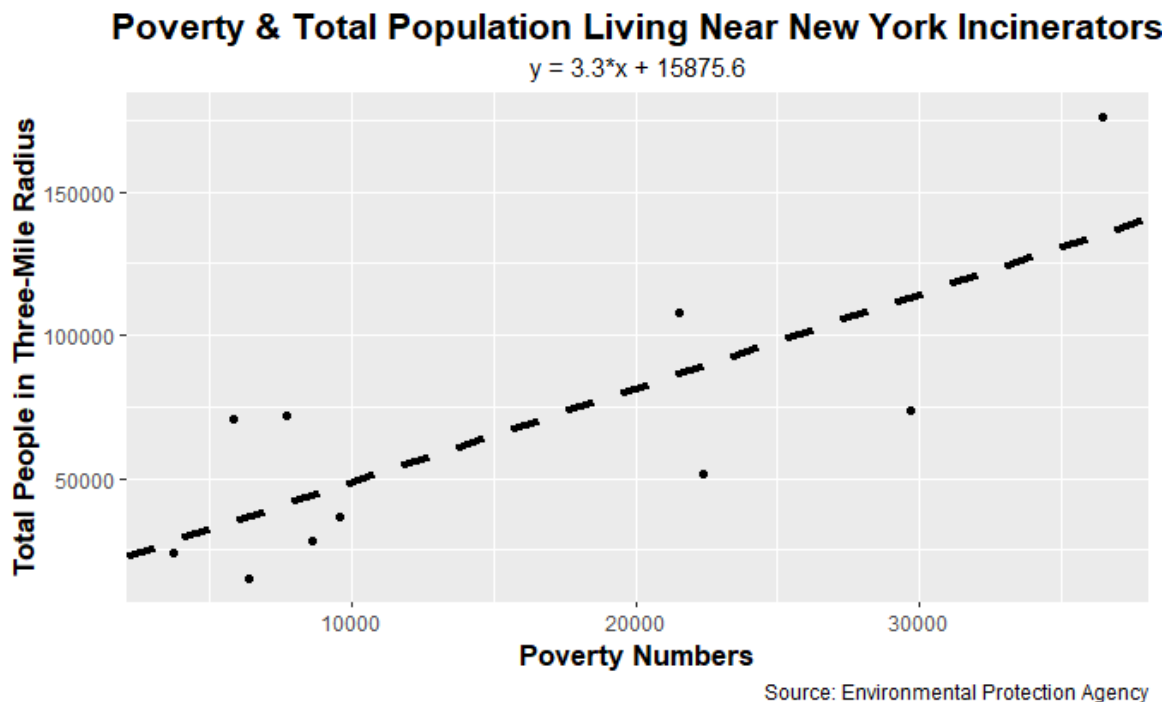
Americans produce a significant portion of waste that officials struggle to contain since the "dump in landfill" method is no longer economical or rational. In 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency reported that Americans produce over 262 million. In 2005, it was roughly 254 million. While the garbage growth rate is slowing down relative to 20th century figures, there still is a significant stream of waste that needs to be addressed.



Source: Environmental Protection Agency, 2018

Lawmakers in Finger Lakes are right to express doubt about any proposed waste-to-energy facility. There exists a correlation between poverty and total population in New York's other communities that host incinerators. Communities living near incinerators are likely to be

poor, although it should be noted there cannot be a casual relationship between the two variables.



Still it is notable that there is even a linear line in the graph below. Essentially, when the number of people in poverty increases by one, then the total number of people in a three-mile radius of an incinerator increases by 3.273. There is a strong relationship between the two variables. While it is unknown what may happen with the bill in New York State, it is possible that the incinerator plan could be stopped. In Baltimore, Wheelabrator already indicated it would file suit to stop the legislation. It's no surprise why as its facility exists in the only state that provides significant renewable subsidies, at least \$10 million since 2011 forecasts to spend. The

incinerator industry knows it cannot keep its "sustainable" model without relying on government subsidies in some capacity. Besides, these subsidies should go toward other technologies that can reduce waste. Lawmakers must consider effective and inclusive strategies that address waste. Recycling, composting, and general zero waste policies are valuable first steps to resolving this issue. Of course, the main priority is always the community. It is time for equitable and distributive policies that ensure that the interests of these communities are prioritized as real concerns, and not just numbers.

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