



TISHMAN CENTER · MAY 20, 2019

# 4.4 million people in the U.S. are exposed to pollution from waste incinerators

*79% of incinerators are located in  
low-income communities and  
communities of color.*

To view the report, please [click here](#).

\* Updated report May 21, 2019.

To view an interactive map of Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) incinerators, please [click here](#).

**New York / Berkeley, USA, 21 May 2019** — The Tishman Environment and Design Center at The New School in New York City has uncovered for the first time that approximately 8 out of 10 waste incinerators in the U.S. are located in environmental justice communities (low-income communities and/or communities of color). These facilities have been known to emit mercury, lead, particulate matter 2.5 and 10, sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxide, and carbon monoxide, all of which pose [significant dangers to public health](#). Many of the communities where incinerators are located are already overburdened by pollution from other industrial sources, causing cumulative impacts that regulators fail to take into account when setting emissions regulations. Approximately 4.4 million people in the United States live within a 3-mile radius of an incinerator.\*

"The BRESCO incinerator creates one-third of the air pollution in Baltimore City, and is responsible for [\\$55 Million dollars in asthma hospitalizations and other health impacts](#)," says Destiny Watford, life-long Baltimore resident and community organizer with United Workers in Baltimore. "I--my family,

friends, and everyone who lives in Curtis Bay can expect to have an entire decade shaved off of our lives because of where we live. I'm more likely to die of lung cancer, respiratory disease, and to suffer from asthma."



"This groundbreaking study from the New School shows what we've known for decades. Low-income communities of color serve as dumping grounds for our nation's waste, impacting health across generations. Cities sit at a crossroads. They can choose to bind themselves to a new generation of incinerators that will cost millions and continue to pollute our most vulnerable communities, or they can transition to a sustainable system that improves public health and saves money," said Denise Patel, U.S. Program Director, GAIA.

In a comprehensive study of the industry in the U.S. from its rise in the 1980's to today, the report concludes that incinerators are a bad investment for cities. "These aging facilities are too expensive to maintain, too risky to finance, and too costly to upgrade," says Ana Baptista, Associate Director of the [Tishman Environment & Design Center](#) at the New School.

"Incinerators in the U.S. are operating under increasingly volatile economic and regulatory conditions that threaten their major sources of revenue, tipping fees and energy sales."

Despite being major climate polluters, many incinerators rely on subsidies meant for renewable energy to keep the business afloat. Whitney Amaya, Zero Waste Community Organizer at East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice in Long Beach, CA states, "It's unfair that incinerators are touted as environmentally-friendly and environmentally sound when they're spewing out toxins that are harming the health of our communities. Why do low-income communities of color have to breathe in trash from cities like Beverly Hills or Santa Monica?"

Cities across the country are recognizing how incinerators are holding up progress towards reducing waste and pollution, and

are moving to close them. In March of this year, Detroit's incinerator closed down after over thirty years of pollution. KT Andresky, Campaign Organizer with Breathe Free Detroit in Michigan states, "Now that we have successfully shut down the Detroit incinerator, our community urges the city of Detroit to put into practice strict recycle, reuse, and reduce standards with a focus on local circular economies, a transition for the workers to green, union jobs and protections for residents against incoming gentrification. In the path towards a zero waste future, no one should be left behind."

While many cities are moving away from incineration, there are incinerators that still remain, and as many of them are at the end of their lifespans, cities around the country are faced with a choice: bail out these polluting, aging facilities or shut them down for good.

Watford states, "We need to change our future as a city. That's why we are taking action and leading the way toward a just transition toward Zero Waste in Baltimore. Our community has been disinvested in, ignored and neglected for generations...and now we are leading the way toward a sustainable future."

Data for the maps are sourced from U.S. EPA Enforcement and

## Compliance History Online

(<https://echo.epa.gov>)

### Media contacts:

*Claire Arkin, Communications*

*Coordinator, GAIA, [claire@no-burn.org](mailto:claire@no-burn.org), +1-510-883-9490 ext: 111*

*David Koepfel, Associate Director of Communications, The New*

*School, [koepfeld@newschool.edu](mailto:koepfeld@newschool.edu), +1-646-909-3794*



## Comments (0)

Newest First

Preview

POST COMMENT...