

## Metro Vancouver should end garbage incineration: study



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A new report urges Metro Vancouver not to build any new waste-to-energy plants and that its existing garbage incinerator in Burnaby be phased out.

Those are among the recommendations in a [new study](#) from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Its paper titled "Closing the Loop" examines solid waste policy through the prism of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and encouraging green industries.

Author Marc Lee takes aim in part at Metro Vancouver's advancing [strategy](#) of building a new waste-to-energy plant to consume 370,000 tonnes of garbage by 2018, ending the region's use of the Cache Creek regional [landfill](#).

The Burnaby [incinerator](#), which burns 280,000 tonnes of waste per year, is a heavy carbon emitter even using disputed official estimates, according to the report, making it a considerably worse source of electricity than burning natural gas.

"Incineration has adverse consequences for health and GHG emissions, and requires a steady stream of waste that is inconsistent with zero waste objectives," the report said.

In particular, it notes plastics and paper – key materials that should be diverted for recycling – contribute the most energy when burned.

"Programs that succeed in reducing waste could, perversely, be a challenge for incinerators needing to run at high enough temperatures to reduce the formation of toxic compounds."

From a climate change perspective, it said, landfilling plastics and wood products would be preferable to incineration, because it would be a form of carbon storage, even though other strategies to reduce, reuse and recycle would be better.

Incineration doesn't make garbage disappear, it said, noting at least 22 per cent is typically reduced to ash that still must be landfilled, while heavy metals and other toxins can escape.

"Even if energy is produced from incineration, it is uneconomic energy as it destroys useful materials that are costly to replace from virgin sources."

The report also urges province-wide composting and a phase-out of single-use products and packaging.

Materials that are toxic or non-recyclable should be either banned or tightly regulated.

It also says B.C. needs to develop green manufacturing or reprocessing industries, but admits it will be challenging.

Public investments will be needed, it says, to support a shift away from landfills and incinerators in favour of waste reduction, reuse, repair and maintenance, and finally recycling and composting.

No estimate is provided of the public cost, but the report argues fees to landfill or incinerate garbage should be steadily increased to create an advantage for diversion.

It also notes much of what's considered recycling is really "down-cycling" – degrading something like high-quality plastic to lower-grade uses like plastic wood.

The study admits its ultimate "closed loop" vision of a low-waste society where appliances, for example, are repaired and reused for far longer than today is at odds with an open economy that freely allows imports and exports, as well as consumers' penchant for quickly discarding tech gadgets in favour of new models.

"Meaningful progress will be difficult," it said, but argued changes made now will be "much less painful than if we wait for nature to impose its own limits tomorrow."

Nineteen firms are in the running to build a new waste-to-energy plant for Metro Vancouver.

Over the [next two years](#) the regional district is to determine a preferred technology and identify potential sites.

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