Smoke and Mirrors in Montgomery, Alabama

The facts don't match the claims with Montgomery's new mixed waste processing facility

BASIC FACTS



The City of Houston is currently evaluating five bids for Mayor Parker's "One Bin for All" proposal that would have residents throw trash and recycling into the same bin to be separated at a new mixed waste processing facility. In response to concerns that similar facilities (also known as "dirty MRFs") have been proven to fail many other cities, City of Houston officials have pointed to a new facility in Montgomery, AL as evidence that recent advances in technology have now made their proposal viable. But the evidence revealed so far shows otherwise.

Dirty MRF opened April 14, 2014

- **25-year contract** at fixed rate to the City of Montgomery; requires City to deliver a minimum amount of waste or pay fees
- **$35 million** start-up costs
- **Incineration ash from a future trash-to-fuel plant** contracted to be landfilled or sold to third-party
- Advertised as processing 35 tons per hour of mixed household trash
- Residents are asked to sort out certain waste such as kitty litter, dirty diapers, electronics, household hazardous waste and other products and leave these materials on the curb separately

As soon as this facility opened and before the composting facility was constructed, company officials began to claim that it is achieving a 60% "diversion rate." Most cities define "diversion" as the percent of trash kept out of landfills due to recycling and composting. Some cities in other states include other uses such as "alternative daily cover," i.e. material put on top of landfills. (State law in Texas does not allow alternative daily cover to be counted as diversion.)

Unanswered Questions:

What is Montgomery's definition of "diversion," and does it include "alternative daily cover?"

Would Houstonians also need to sort out kitty litter and dirty diapers for separate collection?

What percent is being *recycled* if the paper is being rejected? What happens to this paper?

Is yard waste included in this facility?

What kind of incineration technology will produce the ash?

WHAT THEY DON'T TELL YOU

Recycling business officials who have toured the facility say it is running much slower than 35 tons per hour, closer to 10

- Houston's "One Bin for All" facility is supposed to process *2,000* tons per day

A traditional recycling facility in Pensacola, FL shut down due to flooding and the Montgomery facility has been receiving pre-sorted, single-stream recycling ever since

- The diversion rate for these materials would be higher than 60%, distorting the diversion rate for commingled materials

According to the DC-based Paper Recycling Coalition, recyclers purchasing Montgomery's paper have ***rejected at least 10 shipments of paper for being too contaminated***

- The Paper Recycling Coalition has written Mayor Parker a letter opposing "One Bin for All" saying commingling paper with food wastes threatens the recyclable fiber supply in Texas

Unless we want to take company officials at their word, there is no independent reporting to show that the Montgomery dirty MRF is achieving 60% diversion through recycling. **City Council members should demand independent verification for these claims!**

"Trash-to-Fuel" Incinerator Plan in Montgomery, AL Threatens Environmental Justice Communities

Montgomery is **56.6%** African American. However, **72%** of the residents who live within a 2-mile radius of the brand new IREP (Infinitus Renewable Energy Park) dirty MRF facility in Montgomery are African American.[1]

In addition, **35.6%** of residents in the two surrounding zip codes live below the poverty line, a majority female.



Infinitus Energy, which runs the plant in Montgomery, has documented plans to implement an "engineered fuel power plant" in the near future. ***Partner firms in this venture are also bidders on the "One Bin for All" proposal in Houston.***

"Engineered fuel" refers to incinerating trash either through mass burn incineration or converting it to gas and burning it through catalytic conversion, pyrolysis or gasification. ***These incineration technologies were also requested in Houston's "One Bin for All" Request for Qualifications.*** It may also refer to Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF), a process in which trash is converted into pellets and then burned as a substitute for coal. All of these are versions of trash incineration that contribute to hazardous air pollution and produce toxic ash byproducts.

Clearly these incineration methods are NOT recycling and would create health risks for residents, especially low-income communities of color living near the "power plant."

The facility's contract[2] includes provisions that present high risks for the City of Montgomery:

- The City of Montgomery must provide a minimum amount of waste for the lifetime of the incinerator or it must pay for the cost of that waste. This "put-or-pay" clause actively discourages recycling and waste reduction and creates long-term financial risk.
- Ash disposal clauses allow the facility to dispose of incinerator ash in area landfills, which could release toxins such as dioxins into the environment.

Houston should not abandon curbside recycling and enter into long-term contracts with facilities that create air pollution and toxic waste byproducts.

Prepared by the Zero Waste Houston Coalition:

Robert D. Bullard, Dean of the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs, Texas Southern University
Melanie Scruggs, Texas Campaign for the Environment
Jackie Young, San Jacinto River Coalition
Bill Crosier, Houston Peace and Justice Center
Dr. Denae King, Texas Southern University
Dr. Jacqueline Smith, Environment and Climate Justice Chair, NAACP Houston Branch
Art Browning, Chair, Sierra Club Houston Regional Group

www.zerowastehouston.org

[1] http://www.recyclingtoday.com/Infinitus-Energy-BHS-MRF-Montgomery.aspx
http://www.city-data.com/income/income-Montgomery-Alabama.html

[2] https://www.dropbox.com/s/g7a55k0w047uh1c/IREP%20Montgomery%20Contract.pdf