

WHAT POLICYMAKERS CAN DO TO ENCOURAGE ENERGY RECOVERY

ENERGY RECOVERY IS PART OF EPA'S SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT HIERARCHY

Energy recovery has long been a part of the federal government's solid waste hierarchy. Reduction, reuse, recycling and recovery are all preferable to landfill disposal. For materials that cannot be recycled due to food contamination or other reasons, recovery is better than disposal.

ENERGY RECOVERY FROM PLASTICS HAS MANY BENEFITS

- It's a source of secure, domestic energy
- It's consistent with state renewable energy portfolio standards
- It diverts waste from and reduces reliance on landfills
- It complements mechanical recycling programs
- It reduces the carbon footprint of waste management. Emerging technologies could enable further reductions in CO₂ emissions
- It provides flexibility. Right now, municipal solid waste gets converted into energy at facilities nationwide. And technology is under development or being piloted to process non-recycled plastics into solid, liquid, and gaseous fuels, or chemicals and feedstocks.

POLICY PRIORITIES

Broaden Definitions of "Renewable Energy" and "Clean Energy"

Energy recovery is a form of clean and renewable energy, yet policies often do not define it as such. Definitions need to be broadened to include energy derived from all types of municipal solid waste (MSW), not just biomass. Non-recycled plastics from MSW, industrial, commercial, agricultural, and other sources should qualify. Energy recovery should be treated equally with wind, solar, geothermal, hydropower, and biofuels.

Define Valuable Materials as "Fuels"

Regulations define MSW used in energy recovery as "solid waste" or "waste disposal," rather than recognizing it as the key energy source it is. This must be changed so that non-recycled plastics and other valuable materials are defined as "fuel" rather than "waste."

Simplify State Permitting Processes, Include Energy Recovery in Recycling and Diversion Goals

State environmental permitting of energy recovery facilities is complex, slow and costly – made so by regulators' lack of familiarity with the technology and uncertainty about how to classify it. Permit application and evaluation processes need to be clarified and simplified. Another challenge is that when MSW is used as energy or converted to fuels, feedstocks, or raw materials, it often does not count toward states' mandated recycling and recovery rates. These programs need to recognize energy recovery.

Diversify Government Purchases of Renewable Energy

Energy sourced from non-recycled plastics is often left out of government renewable energy purchases. These programs should clearly cover energy sourced from non-recycled plastics and other materials.

Help Develop an "All of the Above" Energy Strategy

Our nation's energy policy must harness all domestic energy sources. Policymakers should help develop a national energy strategy that maximizes a diverse range of sources, including renewables, alternatives, coal, nuclear, energy recovery, and oil and natural gas production, particularly from revolutionary new shale finds.