

Coalition Against the Incinerator (CAI)

[Note: the coalition no longer exists... this site is maintained by [ActionPA](#) for historic purposes.]

No New Incinerator in Harrisburg!

Close it, Keep it Closed, Clean it Up!

...one step down, two to go!

[What can I do?](#)

[New
Incinerator](#)

[Environmental
Hearing
Board Appeal](#)

[History](#)

[Incinerator
Photos](#)

[Environmental
Justice](#)

[NAACP
Support](#)

[Dioxin /
Arctic Fallout](#)

[Economics](#)

[Recycling and
Jobs](#)

[Letters to the
Editor](#)

[Waste
Importation](#)

[Hundreds
ignored by](#)



[Recycling](#) is the alternative!

On June 18th, 2003, the Harrisburg incinerator finally closed, ending the 30 year operation of the nation's oldest trash incinerator and the largest known single source of [dioxin air pollution](#) since the 1994 closure of the Columbus, Ohio incinerator.

Unfortunately, the Harrisburg Authority and the Mayor are intent on building a new incinerator in its place, rather than pursue recycling and waste reduction as a cleaner, financially-sound, job-producing alternative. On December 31st, 2002, Harrisburg City Council passed Mayor Reed's 2003 budget, a budget with a \$6 million deficit that needs to be balanced by the end of the year. Reed and his Harrisburg Authority hoped to plug this budget hole by having the City Council vote to guarantee a **\$125 million bond** for the Authority to build a new incinerator. In return for putting more Harrisburg taxpayer money on the line to

[DEP, EPA](#)

[Archived
News Articles](#)

[Top 10 Myths](#)

cover the Authority's bad credit rating, the Authority would kick back the money needed to balance the City's budget. Unfortunately, on November 5th, 2003, the City Council agreed to back that bond.

Find out about [Environmental Justice issues](#) around the incinerator.

"As to the incinerator, would there be any thought of restarting this environmentally unfriendly facility if it bordered Bell View Park or Mountindale? City and Dauphin County politicians know the answer is NO!" ~ Rev. Dr. W. Braxton Cooley, Sr.

It's hurting our health

- The Harrisburg Incinerator was one of the [largest sources of dioxin](#) in the country. [Dioxin](#) is the most toxic chemical ever studied. There is [NO safe level of dioxin](#).
- The soot and emissions poison people, leading to more cancer and asthma, and contaminate our air, water and soil.

It's hurting our pocketbook\$

- The incinerator has been losing money every year since 1993, totaling nearly \$25 million in losses through 2002. It has left city taxpayers responsible for its \$145 million debt, and will continue to lose money every day it runs. ([more info...](#))



- Mayor Reed and City Council are putting the taxpayers into another \$125 million in debt to build a new incinerator in the same place.

Mr. Chivis died on 4/9/2004. He was a courageous and principled man and he is greatly missed.

For 30 years, the City of Harrisburg ran a trash incinerator with electrostatic precipitators. The incinerator site is adjacent to the city's largest housing project, Hall Manor. The US EPA closed the incinerator on 12/18/2000 because it was so polluting that it couldn't even come close to meeting the new air pollution laws for large incinerators. The incinerator used a loophole to redefine itself as a small incinerator and restarted on 1/13/2001. US EPA allowed them that loophole only if the incinerator closed down in 2.5 years. On June 18, 2003 the incinerator finally closed, leaving an accumulated debt of \$94 million and a large ash landfill on site.

Trash disposal alternatives are a simple matter compared to the financial problems it has left in its wake.

Barlow Projects Inc. is proposing to replace the old incinerator hardware (except for the stack) with their equipment - essentially building a new incinerator. The Harrisburg Authority (which owns the incinerator) and the mayor are pressing City Council to back this proposal with a \$125 million bond - on the theory that a new incinerator would be profitable enough to pay for itself and its predecessor.

The state NAACP passed a resolution opposing the project on environmental justice grounds.

The PA DEP in September issued an air permit for the project to emit 500 tons per year of pollution, which is being appealed by community members on the grounds that "(1) The Department issued the permit without making any investigation regarding possible violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI, Section 601, 42 U.S.C. §2000d as it is required to do. The Department is the recipient of federal financial resources from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which requires the Department to prevent racial discrimination; and (2) In granting the permit, the Department failed to give any consideration to the emissions of PM2.5 and the amount of PM2.5 in the ambient air."

On October 25th it was reported that the design of the incinerator would be changed from two 400 tpd boilers to three smaller ones. According to the cover letter of the permit, this would require the permitting process to start over again. However, the DEP seemed to ignore its previous stipulation. The permitting process continued uninterrupted.

Top 10 Myths About The Harrisburg Incinerator

1. "We Need the New Incinerator to Dispose of our Trash"

We don't need an 800-ton a day incinerator to handle the trash that the city produces. The city hopes by increasing the size of the incinerator to 800 tons a day, it can produce more electricity to sell to utility companies.

Mayor Reed is seeking to bring waste from outside of Harrisburg to feed the incinerator. By attracting other people's waste to the incinerator the city is subjecting neighborhoods in Harrisburg, Steelton, and Swatara Township to the environmental and economic consequences.

According to the city budget, the city of Harrisburg collects about 100 tons a day in trash from city residents and businesses. Proponents of the incinerator argue that we will have to landfill our trash if we don't burn it. That is a hollow argument because if everything goes as planned, we will still have 100 tons of ash to landfill. When you burn something it doesn't get reduced to nothing. It gets reduced to ash. And burning 800 tons a day will still leave us 100 tons of ash. What have we gained?

If the city gets serious about recycling, composting, and reuse, we can reduce the amount of trash we have to dispose of. That saves landfill space! And making products from recycled plastics, cardboard, paper, glass and metals uses far less energy than making it from scratch.

2. **"The Incinerator Is Not A Health Hazard"**

Burning trash creates a wide range of health-damaging pollutants, including lead, mercury and acid gases. For years the Harrisburg incinerator, the smallest in the state, was suspected by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency as the nation's largest single source of [dioxins](#) - the most toxic chemicals known to science. Dioxins cause cancer, learning disabilities, early puberty, endometriosis, sexual reproductive disorders, and impaired immune systems.

3. **"If we rebuild the incineration using state-of-the-art technology, it will no longer pollute the environment."**

Rebuilding the incinerator with the latest air pollution controls will reduce the pollution released into the air. However, air pollution devices do not prevent the formation of dioxin, which forms when anything with chlorine is burned with plastics or bleached paper. Dioxin is one of the deadly contaminants found in Agent Orange, which has caused health problems to veterans who served in Vietnam.

More and more communities are moving away from incineration. Only two communities in the United States have opened incinerators in the last five years, while 26 incinerators have been closed down. In the past ten years, 93 incinerators have closed and 17 were opened. Five of the incinerators were opened and closed within two years of beginning operations.

4. **"The Incinerator Is A Moneymaker"**

The incinerator has [lost money](#) every year since 1993. As of 2002, losses totaled nearly \$25 million. Right now, the city owes about \$94 million on the incinerator, which is virtually worthless. In April the city refinanced \$77 million of the incinerator's debt, which was purported to save the city money. However, the city actually increased our debt service payments by about \$43 million over the next 30 years. With interest, the city has to pay back \$203 million on the incinerator. Based on the way the payments are scheduled, the bulk of the repayments were pushed into the last 10 years of the repayment schedule, when Mayor Steve Reed will be out of office. Reed is seeking to add another \$125 million to the debt load.

All this debt can be attributed to Reed, who has been mayor for 22 of the 31 years the incinerator has operated. He is the only one in 22 years who has proposed borrowing money on the incinerator and he has created this mountain of debt and he should bear the consequences. He has been like the consumer who trades one credit card for another - charging more and more because the finance charges are eating up more and more of his salary, until one day there is no money to pay the debt.

5. **"The state won't let the capitol city of Harrisburg go bankrupt"**

Some City Council members are willing to take the financial risk posed by the incinerator in the belief that the state will not let Harrisburg go bankrupt. They believe that borrowing the money will stave off the need to deal with the \$94 million debt that is already on the incinerator.

Should Harrisburg become unable to pay its bills and make its bond payments, the city would be subject to the state's Municipalities Financial Recovery Act. Nineteen communities since 1987 have been come under the law, which provides for the state to appoint a coordinator to administer a recovery plan to relieve the financial distress of the municipality. The city of Scranton with a population of about 80,000 has been under state administration for 11 years and still has not been released.

The state recovery plan can include higher taxes, consolidations of services with other communities, and general cutbacks in nonessential services.

6. **"There Is No Alternative To Incineration"**

Harrisburg has a new trash transfer station, capable of processing 500 tons per day. It can handle all the City's trash plus about 400 tons of trash from neighboring towns. It would be cheaper to ship waste to landfills than to incinerate. The best option would be to have a waste management program that encourages waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting.

7. "Incinerators Are Better Than Landfills"

Having an operating incinerator next to a neighborhood is not better than landfills. And the neighborhoods in Steelton and Harrisburg have both. The ash from the incinerator is landfilled on site.

Well-run landfills are much safer than incinerators. Even well-run incinerators convert trash to toxic ash and toxic air emissions. Incinerators require landfills for their toxic ash. This ash is more dangerous than trash in a landfill because toxics more easily leach out of ash. At the Harrisburg incinerator, this toxic ash is dumped on-site. The mounds surrounding the incinerator on 19th Street and Gibson Boulevard are made of ash from the facility.

8. "We Have A Good Recycling Program"

Harrisburg's curbside program does not take mixed office paper, glossy paper, cardboard or flatboard (which most store bought food is packaged in). These items represent a tremendous amount of recyclable material, all of which is currently collected as trash and burned in the incinerator. None of these items can even be deposited at the tiny recycling drop-off cart located at the incinerator.

The state recycling law requires Harrisburg to have a program requiring businesses to recycle. This would also yield a tremendous amount of paper and packaging, yet the City maintains no such program. An aggressive recycling program would save a massive amount of recyclable trash from being burned at the incinerator or landfilled. However, the incinerator needs trash to burn, discouraging reduction and recycling.

9. "60 Jobs Would Be Lost"

Mayor Reed says that if we close the incinerator, 60 employees will be laid off. However, Harrisburg would still have to deal effectively with its trash. Operating a state-of-the-art transfer station and recycling center could easily make up for jobs lost from closing the incinerator and would even create new jobs. [Recycling creates more 8-10 times more jobs than using landfills or incinerators.](#) Rather than pay to rebuild the incinerator, spending a comparable amount of money on recycling could create about [240 times as many jobs!](#)

Further, there are indications that the city does not intend to operate the new incinerator. The city did not name the operator of the facility on the air permit application filed with the PA Department of Environmental Protection. In addition, the city is trying to establish a Keystone Opportunity Expanded Zone in the location where the incinerator is located. The only reason to place the incinerator in a zone would be to get tax relief for those who operate an enterprise within the zone. A government entity does not need a tax break to encourage development

because they don't pay taxes.

Other communities subcontract out trash collection and disposal services - and they do it for less than we are already paying. Plus residents in other communities can put one bulk item out for pick-up every week. In other words, they get more service for less money.

10. "A Shutdown Will Cause Higher Taxes"

If the incinerator is rebuilt, the people who live in Harrisburg, who by law have to use the City Refuse system, will pay higher trash rates. The people of Harrisburg have been and will continue to subsidize the incineration of other people's trash.

Residents already pay \$4.83 to dispose of their trash in the incinerator. The mayor has already proposed to increase the monthly charge to \$8.66 - in addition to the \$12 a month collection fee. At \$8.66 a month, the average household will be paying \$104 a year to dispose of their trash and \$144 to collect it for a total of \$248 a year. The average person in the city produces one-half ton a year in trash. At 2 ¼ people per household, each household generates 1 1/8 tons of trash a year, which means city residents will be paying about \$93 a ton to dispose of trash - not collect it - while the average landfill cost is about one-half of the cost.

By closing down the incinerator now, we can reduce the risk of further losses and contain the debt. Trying to keep the incinerator open will increase the taxpayer debt and make them subject to great risks. When the city backs bonds for the Harrisburg Authority with the full-faith and credit of the city, the elected officials enter into a contract in which they are legally bound to raise fees and taxes high enough to pay off the bondholders - no matter what that means to the residents of the city. Even if we declare bankruptcy, the obligation remains.