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February 14th, 2012

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor Bloomberg,

We are writing to express our serious concerns about your Administration's plan to pilot thermal "waste-to-energy" technologies in New York City. While the next phase of the PlaNYC environmental agenda includes many laudable programs to advance recycling, clean energy and clean air in New York City, this risky, polluting, and unsustainable proposal is not one of them.

The technologies that your Administration is considering pose many of the same environmental and public health concerns as conventional garbage incinerators. Gasification, pyrolysis, and plasma incinerators use heat to convert municipal solid waste (MSW) into a synthetic gas, and then burn it to generate energy. Like conventional incinerators, they release significant amounts of air pollution, including mercury, dioxin, and other toxics, particulate matter, and greenhouse gases. They also generate large quantities of toxic residue that must be treated and disposed of, such as ash, slag, and wastewater. All of these processes are considered incineration by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the European Union.

The fact that there are no commercial-scale gasification, pyrolysis or plasma MSW incinerators operating in the United States raises additional concerns about the viability of these technologies. In other countries, these experimental technologies have been plagued with cost overruns and

operational problems, including malfunctions, explosions, shutdowns, and accidental releases of toxic gases. As a result, many of these plants have never made it past the design stage or have had to be permanently shut down.

The City's 2006 Phase 2 study of these technologies was significantly hampered by the fact that it relied exclusively on information voluntarily supplied by the companies. The consultants who prepared the analysis made no effort to independently verify the companies' safety and performance claims. For instance, the Thermoselect incinerator in Karlsruhe, Germany, one of the largest MSW gasification plants in the world, was forced to close down permanently in 2004, at a loss of approximately \$500 million, due to continued malfunctions and operating problems. These included an explosion, leaks of cyanide-contaminated wastewater, and uncontrolled releases of toxic gases. While Thermoselect was one of the technologies reviewed in the City's Phase 2 study, none of these problems at the facility were identified in the report.

Garbage incineration would further degrade air quality in New York City. Despite your stewardship of steady progress in cleaning New York City's air pollution, the City is still failing to meet federal health-based standards for ozone and fine particle pollution. In addition, the EPA's National Air Toxics Assessment found that New York City residents are at elevated risk for cancer and respiratory illness due to the presence of airborne toxics at many times the "safe level." Most of the potential industrial sites for an incinerator in New York City are in, or adjacent to, low-income communities of color that are already disproportionately burdened by other undesirable land uses, dense truck traffic and excess pollution. Incinerator emissions would adversely impact public health in these communities, adding to the already elevated rates of asthma and other respiratory ailments, heart disease, and premature deaths. While a pilot project may seek to initially avoid overburdened communities of color, the scale required to divert meaningful percentages of the City's waste stream means that these polluting technologies will inevitably be inequitably sited in these communities.

You have made environmental sustainability and public health protection a top priority for your Administration. Your Administration has taken bold steps to reduce the carbon footprint of New York's waste management infrastructure through its commitment to establishing marine and rail transfer stations to maximize the use of rail and barge to transport waste in a more environmentally just and fair way. We believe that piloting thermal waste-to-energy is inconsistent with the City's sustainability goals and will roll back progress that has been made to date to improve air quality and manage the City's waste more equitably.

Rather than gambling on risky and unproven incineration technologies, New York City should emphasize waste reduction, reuse, recycling, and composting, which could divert 80% or more of the waste stream. Minimizing the amount of waste New Yorkers dispose of has tremendous potential to save the City money while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, preventing pollution, and creating local jobs and economic development opportunities. While PlaNYC 2030 contains a number of positive steps to expand these programs and improve the city's 15% recycling rate, far more needs to be done to be consistent with the state's goal of reducing the amount of waste New Yorkers dispose of by 85% by 2030. Merely diverting waste from landfills and sending it to incinerators is not a step forward in sustainability.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to advance environmentally sound, socially equitable and economically sustainable solutions for managing New York City's solid waste. We understand that the City plans to issue an RFP shortly for waste-to-energy proposals. We request that the City's RFP specifically exclude thermal waste-to-energy technologies. Thank you for your consideration of our concerns.

Signed,

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