



# TRANSFORMING TRASH

**C**ommunities across the country are winning environmental and economic justice for working families by improving the way they manage their trash. Local governments, spurred on by worker organizations, environmentalists, and community groups, are using their power to insist on more recycling, better jobs, less pollution, and more accountability from the waste industry. Cities are also looking to new partnerships with the recycling and trash industry to generate new revenue and economic development.

## **TODAY: A Dirty Industry**

Left on its own, the waste and recycling industry causes serious harm to workers, communities, and the environment. Recycling jobs are mainly staffed by people of color, immigrants, and temporary workers who earn minimum wage, are exposed to daily hazards on the job, and have no voice for change.

Although many are making a public commitment to recycling, large waste companies prioritize landfill disposal, incineration, and waste-to-energy schemes. In doing so, they accelerate climate change and local pollution, usually in low-income communities of color.

In a time when most cities struggle with budget deficits, a hands-off approach to managing private waste companies leaves cities without the tools they need to ensure that the industry pays its fair share of costs.

## **TOMORROW: Growing Greed or Growing Green?**

The waste and recycling industry will keep growing as population and consumption rises, and as cities expand recycling programs. A survey of the 35 largest metro areas in the US revealed that over half are engaged in aggressive plans to increase recycling. If these efforts increase recycling by 40 percent 1.5 million jobs could be created over the next 20 years.

Policymakers and local advocates have an opportunity to shape the waste industry's growth to ensure that its problems do not grow with it. Policy tools available to cities can make the industry cleaner and greener while maximizing the industry's contribution to the local economy and capturing the value of trash for the public good.

# Trashing Communities, Exploiting Workers

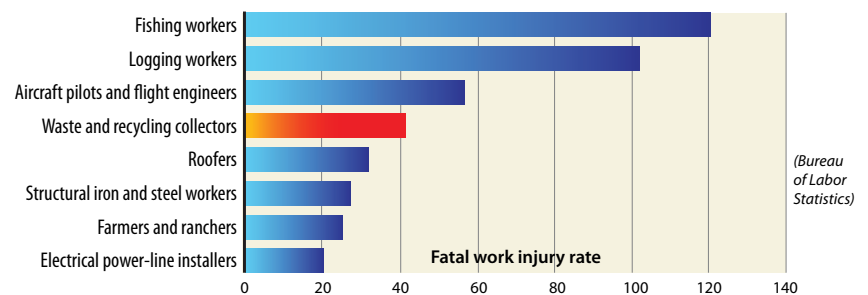
The waste and recycling industry harms communities and the environment by:

- **Dumping the burden of society's trash on communities of color.** In cities like New York, Denver, and Oakland, transfer, sorting and incineration facilities are located in low-income communities of color, burdening residents with associated noise, pollution, and truck traffic.
- **Putting dirty diesel collection trucks on our city streets.** Over 90 percent of collection trucks in the United States are diesel powered, contributing to 21,000 premature deaths caused by exposure to diesel emissions each year.
- **Sending too much trash to landfills and incinerators.** Landfills are responsible for 34 percent of man-made methane emissions in the US, one of the most potent greenhouse gasses.

The waste and recycling industry takes advantage of workers as well as communities by:

- **Creating a vulnerable workforce.** Sorters at recycling facilities are generally women, people of color, and immigrants hired from temporary employment agencies, creating a highly transient and exploitable workforce.
- **Paying poverty wages.** Sorters' vulnerability means trash companies can get away with paying minimum wage and not offering health insurance even though workers are exposed to toxic and hazardous materials on a daily basis.
- **Subjecting workers to dangerous and life threatening conditions.** The waste and recycling industry reported the fourth highest rate of on the job fatalities in 2011 across all industries.

## Fourth Deadliest Job in the Nation



## Trash Jobs Don't Have to be Bad Jobs

**Some trash collectors earn family-supporting wages, while providing high quality service to residential customers.** Good jobs are possible where cities either manage their trash as a public service, or where strong unions and worker organizations have won high standards. For example, the City of San Francisco and the private company Recology work together to create good jobs through an exclusive partnership. Recology waste haulers and processors earn a family-supporting wage, receive health insurance and retirement benefits, have paid vacation and sick time, and receive the training they need to advance their careers.

## Recovering Good Jobs in Milwaukee



**Citizen Action of Wisconsin** is working to bring the job creation potential of comprehensive recycling to Milwaukee, a city that has lost hundreds of thousands of blue-collar industrial jobs over the last 30 years. In addition to high unemployment, the disappearance of auto parts manufacturing left large swaths of abandoned industrial land in the center of the city. Expanding

recycling on that land could create over 840 new jobs. Citizen Action of Wisconsin is developing a plan to locate a new publicly owned recycling facility in Milwaukee, send food waste to compost for urban farming, expand deconstruction of abandoned properties, and develop a resource recovery park that would be the center of local job creation.

## Cleaning Up Trash in New York

Two factors drive momentum to change New York's solid waste management system: the cost of exporting trash and the need to remedy decades of environmental injustice. Experts anticipate that the current \$300 million annual cost of exporting trash will rise in the coming years. Increasing the City's abysmally low recycling rate promises to prevent a budgetary crisis and provide a more economically and environmentally just and sustainable system of solid waste management.

The private hauling industry takes New York's commercial waste to facilities concentrated in a handful of low-income communities of color. New York's environmental justice organizations have won historic change by working with the City to distribute transfer stations receiving residential waste equitably throughout the boroughs. However, the City's commercial waste sector remains relatively unregulated. Recently, the industry has introduced new plans for trash incineration facilities, often referred to as waste-to-energy, in metro areas as a possible solution to the City's waste crisis. These incineration schemes would revive longstanding patterns of environmental racism, distort markets for environmentally beneficial recycling, and would create only a small fraction of the jobs that recycling would create.

The Alliance for a Greater New York (ALIGN) is building a coalition of labor and environmental justice groups that are uniting to oppose incineration schemes and reduce the disproportionate impact the waste management system has on low-income communities of color. This coalition is also working to establish labor and environmental standards for the private waste and recycling hauling industry that will create new jobs, raise wages, increase recycling, and expand the local recycling reliant manufacturing industry.

## Raising Worker Voices for Better Recycling and Good Jobs

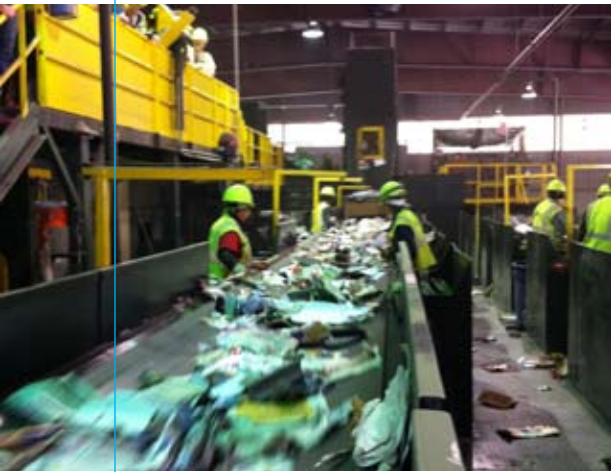


The East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy in Oakland, Community Labor United in Boston, and the Center on Policy Initiatives in San Diego are all developing campaigns designed to help recycling facility workers win fair wages and benefits, safety-oriented work rules and training, and a voice on the job that will help them improve the safety, efficiency and effectiveness of the recycling sorting process. Ultimately, this work will be tied to career paths that move workers from sorting jobs to higher paying hauling, reuse, and recycling-reliant manufacturing jobs, and long-term middle class careers. These campaigns build on each organization's track record of influencing city economic development and green jobs policy, and building broad coalitions of environmentalists, labor, community, and environmental justice organizations.



# City Governments Can Transform Trash

Local solutions create a virtuous cycle of better jobs, more recycling, and increased community benefits



On the surface, whether trash ends up in a landfill or a recycling facility appears to depend on the behavior and choices of individuals. But the truth is that what happens to our trash is governed by policy choices that are made by local and state governments. This local control overlaps with where advocacy organizations are best able to make change.

Policy makers and advocates who want to capture the full environmental and economic benefits that flow from transforming the trash industry must take a more proactive approach towards managing their trash by utilizing a range of policy tools.

Strategies include:

- **Transforming waste and recycling jobs into good jobs for local residents** by establishing standards that increase wages and encourage the use of full-time employees, enforcing minimum safety and skills training requirements, and protecting workers' right to organize for a voice on the job and in their communities.
- **Holding the industry accountable for its environmental and health impacts** by setting standards that prioritize recycling over landfill disposal and incineration, require clean natural gas trucks and efficient routes, and address the disproportionate impact the industry's facilities have on communities of color and low-income communities.
- **Creating systems that empower local government, lower costs, and promote transparency and accountability** by using franchise agreements and service contracts to structure local government's relationship with private industry.
- **Ensuring fair rates and full access to recycling services for small business owners and property owners** by partnering with haulers to create efficient and economical collection systems that extend service to stakeholders who have been left out, or subjected to impossibly high rates.
- **Supporting economic development and growth in the reuse and remanufacturing sectors** by adopting policies that will produce a high quality supply of recyclable materials and build markets for recycled products.

## Uncovering Cost Savings in the Management of Waste

Cities can save money on the cost of waste management by proactively managing their local waste industry. In many cities, a hands-off approach to managing the industry has led to poor accounting of fees due to the city, increased wear and tear on city infrastructure, costly inefficiency, and missed opportunities to capture the value of recycled commodities.

Strong franchise agreements or service contracts help cities reduce costs in four ways: stricter accountability for fees due to the city, cost savings and reduced street impact from more efficient route plans, increased fees that go with a higher value franchise, and increased revenue sharing from the sale of a cleaner, more valuable stream of recycled commodities.

## A New Vision for Trash in Los Angeles and Denver

Don't Waste LA — a comprehensive effort to overhaul Los Angeles' broken commercial waste management system — is leveraging the combined power of environmentalists, community leaders, and trash and recycling workers to transform Los Angeles' private waste industry. Three years ago, these groups launched a campaign to address the overflowing landfills, noxious recycling facilities and diesel spewing trash trucks, as well as the struggles of recycling and trash workers, that are emblematic of Los Angeles' "Wild West" commercial waste sector. Under the leadership of the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, the coalition has built public support for a comprehensive structural overhaul of the city's system—and is working to create a model for the rest of the country. Toward that end, the City Council recently adopted Don't Waste LA's proposal for an exclusive franchise for commercial and multi-family trash pickup. This new system will result

in fair rates for small businesses, greater recycling and decreased reliance on landfills, more revenue to the city, and greater standards and accountability for the workers and communities regularly impacted by the city's trash.

In Denver, FRESC: Good Jobs, Strong Communities is also working to transform the city's waste and recycling system. In coordination with local allies and elected officials, FRESC is looking for ways to create a more efficient and cost effective waste and recycling management system. Currently the city manages no less than three collection systems, struggles with illegal dumping, and despite its green reputation has only achieved a 13 percent recycling rate. A transition to a more streamlined system that boosts recycling participation would help Denver achieve its environmental and budgetary goals and create good jobs.





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 @P4WF

The Partnership for Working Families network, together with allies in labor, the environmental justice and environmental movements, and local governments, is leading the effort to transform the trash industry and make it work for communities, workers, and the environment.

## Join Us and Take Action!

- Learn about the recycling and trash industry in your city. Contact us if you want suggestions on where to start.
- Start a conversation about what you could accomplish by transforming trash with your friends and allies.
- Send an email to [transformingtrash@forworkingfamilies.org](mailto:transformingtrash@forworkingfamilies.org) to get connected to other people who are working to implement a new vision of a sustainable waste and recycling system.