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February 14<sup>th</sup>, 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,

Eddie Bautista  
Executive Director  
New York City Environmental Justice  
Alliance

Gavin Kearney  
Director, Environmental Justice  
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Elizabeth Yeampierre  
Executive Director  
UPROSE

Matt Ryan  
Executive Director  
ALIGN: the Alliance for a Greater New  
York

Jessica Azulay Chasnoff  
Organizer  
Alliance for a Green Economy

Michael Seilback  
Vice President, Public Policy &  
Communications  
American Lung Association in New York

Joyce Hogi  
President  
Bronx Council on Environmental Quality

Ansje Miller  
Eastern States Director  
Center for Environmental Health

Laura Haight  
Senior Environmental Associate  
New York Public Interest Research Group

Barbara Warren  
Executive Director  
Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Anne Rabe and Mike Schade  
Campaign Coordinators  
Center for Health, Environment and Justice

Dave Palmer  
Executive Director  
Center for Working Families

Tim Judson  
President  
Citizens' Awareness Network

Cynthia Wilson  
Citizens for a Clean Environment

Kathleen A. Curtis  
Executive Director  
Clean and Healthy New York

Charles Bell  
Programs Director  
Consumers Union

Martha Laureano  
Director, Community Health and  
Environment  
El Puente

Judy Braiman  
President  
Empire State Consumer Project

Kyeong Yool Lee  
President  
Environment Action Association

David VanLuven  
Executive Director  
Environment New York

Ross Gould  
Air & Energy Program Director  
Environmental Advocates of New York

Harry J. Bubbins  
Director  
Friends of Brook Park

Ananda Lee Tan  
North American Program Coordinator  
Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives

Mark Dunlea  
Co-Chair, Issues Committee  
Green Party of NYS

Canem Ozyildirim  
New York Field Organizer  
Greenpeace USA

Michael Heimbinder  
Executive Director  
HabitatMap

Claire L. Barnett  
Founder and Executive Director  
Healthy Schools Network, Inc.

Manna Jo Greene  
Environmental Director  
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

Tara DePorte  
Executive Director  
Human Impacts Institute

Neil Seldman  
President  
Institute for Local Self-Reliance

Oona Chatterjee  
Co-Executive Director  
Make the Road New York

Joan Levine  
Executive Director  
Morningside Heights-West Harlem  
Sanitation Coalition

Donna Stein  
President  
New York City Friends of Clearwater

JK Canepa  
Co-Founder  
New York Climate Action Group

Kate Zidar  
Executive Director  
Newtown Creek Alliance

Colin Beavan  
Executive Director  
No Impact Project

Beryl A. Thurman  
Executive Director  
North Shore Waterfront Conservancy of  
Staten Island

Jessica Clemente  
Executive Director  
Nos Quedamos

Joe Parrish  
NY Environmental Watch

Adam Friedman  
Director  
Pratt Center for Community Development

Michael Brochner  
Interim Executive Director  
Sustainable South Bronx

Clare Donohue  
Founding Member  
Sane Energy Project

Kellie Terry-Sepulveda  
Executive Director  
The Point CDC

Chris Burger  
Zero Waste Committee Chair  
Sierra Club - Atlantic Chapter

Ogonnaya Dotson-Newman  
Director of Environmental Health  
WE ACT for Environmental Justice

Diane Buxbaum, MPH  
Conservation Chair  
Sierra Club - New York City Group

Courtney Renken  
Organizer  
Williamsburg-Greenpoint OUTRAGE  
(Organizations United for Trash Reduction  
and Garbage Equity)

Helen Bialer  
President  
Staten Island Citizens for Clean Air

David Shuffler  
Executive Director  
Youth Ministries for Peace & Justice

Nick Lynn  
Chair, NYC Chapter  
Surfrider Foundation

Cc: Cas Holloway, Deputy Mayor for Operations  
David Bragdon, Director, Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability  
Bill de Blasio, New York City Public Advocate  
John C. Liu, New York City Comptroller  
Christine C. Quinn, New York City Council Speaker  
Letitia James, Chair, City Council Sanitation and Solid Waste Management Committee  
Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President  
Marty Markowitz, Brooklyn Borough President  
Ruben Diaz, Jr., Bronx Borough President  
Helen Marshall, Queens Borough President  
James P. Molinaro, Staten Island Borough President