

The Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

Work Session

LD 911 An Act To Prohibit The Reception Of Foreign Waste Plastic In Maine Ports

May 5, 2021

Honorable Chairwoman Senator Stacy Brenner and Honorable Chairman Representative Ralph Tucker and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present comments in support of LD 911 for your work session consideration. My name is Jacquelyn Elliott. I live in Waterboro, Maine where I retired in 2010 having lived most of my lifetime in my native Granite State.

I have spent three decades as an environmental health and justice advocate and activist. I have focused primarily on the issue of waste management policy promoting strategies that seek sustainable front-end choices that conserve resources; reduce the amount and toxicity of residuals needing disposal; and provide end solutions that are just for all peoples, protect our air, waters, lands, and public health.

I am aware of some of the concerns The Committee has heard about how federal and international laws may affect LD 911. Those concerns have resulted in some ambivalence by some offering testimony as to whether to support or oppose this legislation.

That being so, it would be my hope that this legislation could begin an important conversation considering what is involved with the matter of the proliferation of plastics in the waste stream. The incident last winter when foreign plastic waste was washed onto Maine's shores, was a harsh introduction to the realities of what is occurring with the handling of the burgeoning quantities of throw-away plastic assaulting Maine and the world.

Bales of shredded plastic were dropped into the Penobscot Bay during unloading. They had originated in the United Kingdom and were destined for one of Maine's trash incinerators in Orrington. Instead, tons of plastic trash became a toxic tide lapping and collecting on our shores. Citizens were rightly alarmed when they discovered this plastic in the process of disintegrating into micro and nano particles on its way to becoming ubiquitous in our environment with ultimate deadly consequences.

The fact that this incident went unreported until such time as citizens began discovering the plastic washing ashore and notified a local journalist and posted what they were finding on Facebook, raises serious questions about oversight and accountability.

These fugitive bales of plastic are what is called SRF (solid-recovered fuel) and are used for fueling boilers, in the instance of the Orrington incinerator destination, fuel for creating electricity. Plastic is a fuel of choice for such incinerators especially when MSW (municipal solid waste) used for fuel is in shorter supply or contains more moisture during winter months.

The realization that Maine is receiving tons of foreign plastic waste to turn into toxic smoke and ash to pollute our environment at first seems bizarre. But for anyone who is acquainted with the World of Waste, it is business as usual. And more concerning still, is the fact that overall, Maine is pretty much a target for a variety of waste streams looking for a terminus.

Regionally, Maine's regulations make it appealing as other states are tightening their rules as to how ever-increasing amounts of more toxic waste can be disposed. The rules tighten, but the policies are incomplete and fail to take front end actions that more effectively deal with the problem. Instead, Maine becomes the "solution" for others irresponsibility. Our mountains of disposed waste grow and our incinerators burn away.

Policy makers, regulators, legislators, hard-pressed municipal officials shy away from the probing questions and are tempted by the sharp talking techno hucksters. They come offering unproven waste wizardry usually linked to the need for lots of public dollars to get it up and running. And then they run.... And Maine has foreign plastic washing ashore.

Plastic waste is an ever-growing problem. And there is lots of money to be made by keeping it growing. There are already on-going efforts in Maine to increase the flow of plastic into the state for "processing" that will likely result in additional disposal needs. We need to understand what is really involved and begin to take steps to turn things around. Our personal health, the health of Maine, and the health of our planet is truly at stake.

I hope you will see LD 911 as an opportunity to begin that process. I am enclosing some links to information that you might find useful. Thank you for considering my comments.

Please see: Fact Sheet: Plastics and Incineration

<https://www.no-burn.org/fact-sheet-plastic-and-incineration/>

US Legislation Alert: American Chemistry Council's Effort to Push "plastic-to-fuel" Bills

<https://www.no-burn.org/https-www-no-burn-org-legislativealert/>

Understanding the Impacts of Chemical Recycling https://zerowasteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/zwe_jointpaper_UnderstandingEnvironmentalImpactsofCR_en.pdf

Transposing the Basel Convention Plastic Waste Amendments: Challenges & Recommendations https://www.no-burn.org/wp-content/uploads/Policy-briefing_Transposing-the-Basel-Convention-plastic-waste-amendments_November-2020.pdf

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