Wastepickers and Climate Change

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Wastepickers are workers in the informal economy who recover recyclable materials from waste. They are invisible entrepreneurs on the frontlines of the fight against climate change, earning livelihoods from recovery and recycling, reducing demand for natural re-sources, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Yet their successes are being undermined by "waste-to-energy" technologies.

Climate benefits.

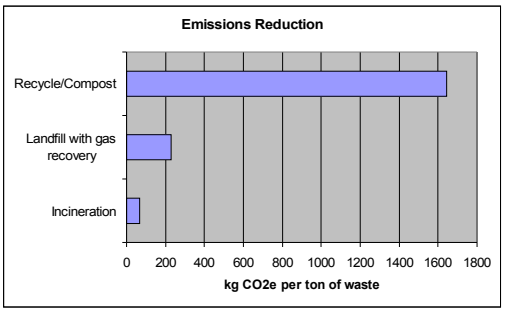
Recycling is one of the cheapest and fastest ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Avoiding one ton of CO2 emissions through recycling costs 30% less than doing so through energy efficiency, and 90% less than wind power.i

Recycling and livelihoods.

Recycling provides productive work for an estimated 1% of the population in developing countries, in processes such as collection, recovery, sorting, grading, cleaning, baling, processing and manufacturing into new products. Even in developed countries, recycling provides 10 times as many jobs per ton of waste as do incinerators and landfills.ii

Wastepickers on the frontline.

Wastepickers' efforts to expand and formalize operations should be supported. This will result in more resource recovery, productive work, better working conditions, and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.



Source: "Assessment of Materials Management Options for the Massachusetts Solid Waste Master Plan Review," Tellus Institute December 2008, p.2

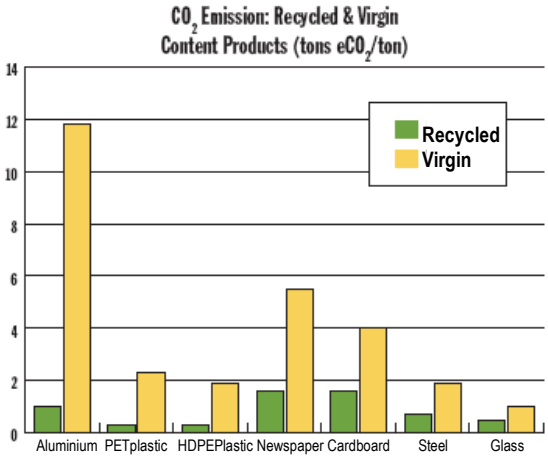
Recycling saves energy and trees.

It also saves money. Resource recovery reduces emissions in the forestry, mining and manufacturing sectors by replacing virgin materials used in manufacturing. Much less energy is required to manufacture goods from recycled materials, such as glass, metals and plastic, than from virgin materials.

In the case of paper and wood products, there is another advantage: recycling paper products means less demand for wood and less deforestation.

"Waste-to-energy" vs. recycling.

Incineration and landfill gas schemes conflict directly with recycling and composting, competing for similar materials: paper, cardboard, plastics and organics. Yet recycling reduces emissions 25 times more than incineration does.iii And incinerators emit more CO2 per unit of electricity than do coal-fired power plants.iv



Source: "Assessment of Materials Management Options for the Massachusetts Solid Waste Master Plan Review," Tellus Institute December 2008, Appendix 3, page 1.

False solutions undermine wastepickers.

The Clean Development Mechanism and some governments support incinerators and similar technologies in the mistaken belief that they will reduce emissions. Instead, climate subsidies should be redirected to the informal recycling sector to expand recycling.

i "Comparing Carbon Footprint Effects and Costs from Diversion vs. Energy Programs," Lisa A. Skumatz, Ph.D., presentation at California Resource Recovery Association, August, 2008.
ii Institute for Local Self-Reliance, Washington, DC, 1997. www.ilsr.org/recycling
iii "Assessment of Materials Management Options for the Massachusetts Solid Waste Master Plan Review," Tellus Institute December 2008, p.2.
iv USEPA's Emissions & Generation Resource Integrated Database, 2000

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Delegation Statement:

We, waste pickers and other recycling workers in the informal economy are highly-efficient environmental entrepreneurs. We are owed a climate debt for our historical and current contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and solid waste management costs.

Materials recovery and recycling is the preferred option for all waste management programs. We do not consider landfill gas-to-energy projects, incineration projects, and refuse derived fuel to be recycling or recovery operations.

Industrialized countries must reduce consumption of natural resources, limit waste generation, increase in-country recycling, and avoid all export of waste and technologies that contribute to climate change.

We call upon the UNFCCC and our national governments to:

1. Recognize the critical and productive role that the informal recycling sector contributes to climate change mitigation, and invest in resource recovery programs that ensure decent livelihoods for all workers and traders in the recycling economy.

2. Review and end support for all waste projects and technologies that divert waste from recycling into incineration and landfilling.

3. Establish mitigation mechanisms that are directly accessible to waste workers in the informal sector, and result in significant financial and technical support.

4. Establish adaptation mechanisms that take into account the human costs of waste disposal, compensate communities for negative impacts, and consult with existing recyclers and wastepickers prior to the approval of any waste-to-energy proposal.

5. Support projects and technologies that divert organic waste from landfills into composting and biomethanation, which will eliminate waste-based methane emissions and should be the preferred option.

Bonn, June 8th. 2009

UNFCCC SIDE EVENT
JUNE 10TH WEDNESDAY
18:00-19:30
(METRO room-Ministry of Transport)

Wastepickers: unseen entrepreneurs on the frontline of climate change

The informal waste sector currently contributes considerable, unacknowledged mitigation. But it is threatened by CDM-backed waste-to-energy projects which would increase GHG emissions and reduce employment.

AVINA www.avina.net

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KKPKP Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat INDIA KKPKP

www.recicladores.net

WIEGO Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing www.wiego.org