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To the editor:

The seven modern waste-to-energy facilities in Massachusetts provide safe, reliable disposal for nearly half of the waste that cannot be recycled and in return generates clean, renewable electricity that powers nearly 200,000 homes. Most unbiased observers would view this as a true “win-win”. Unfortunately, a letter to the editor by Jay Rasku, published on November 3, exemplifies a common misunderstanding of the waste-to-energy industry and ignores the fact that all waste-to-energy plants meet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s strictest air pollution control requirements.

Today’s waste-to-energy facilities have installed state-of-the-art pollution control systems at considerable expense and operate very cleanly. The author illustrates his bias simply by labeling waste-to-energy plants as “incinerators”, a term that more accurately describes facilities in operation more than 30 years ago without pollution controls and without electricity generation. In fact, the U.S. EPA has described waste-to-energy as producing electricity with “less environmental impact than almost any other source of electricity.” Furthermore, waste-to-energy is the preferred disposal option for the same European nations heralded by environmental groups as being global environmental leaders.

Massachusetts already exports almost two million tons of trash each year because of a lack of in-state disposal capacity. We believe that more waste can and should be recycled and that the remaining waste must be disposed of responsibly. Landfill expansions and siting new landfills continue to encounter opposition, highlighting the need to remove the moratorium on new waste-to-energy facilities.

Lifting the moratorium does not create a right to build a waste-to-energy plant but rather allows it to be an option. A new facility must still undergo the rigors of the Commonwealth’s extensive and thorough permitting processes, including the completion of an environmental impact assessment, a demonstration that all of the environmental requirements will be met, and the issuance of a Site Assignment by the local Board of Health. Any facility that can successfully navigate these processes, provide safe disposal of household trash, and generate renewable energy deserves equal consideration with other waste management strategies.

Sincerely,

Ted Michaels  
President  
Integrated Waste Services Association