

Resource Recovery Facility Ownership: Options and Implications

- Resources recovery, also known as waste-to-energy, is a method by which nonrecyclable municipal solid waste (MSW) is disposed of, by combusting the waste to reduce its volume and recover energy.
- Connecticut is home to six resources recovery facilities (RRFs) located in Bridgeport, Bristol, Hartford, Lisbon, Preston, and Wallingford, all of which began commercial operation from 1988 through 1995.
- Connecticut disposes 65 percent of its disposable solid waste at its resources recovery facilities, relying on that form of disposal far more than any other state in the nation. Twenty-four percent of the remainder of the state's MSW is recycled and 11 percent is handled at two landfills (per *State of Garbage In America 2006*, using 2003 and 2004 data)
- In comparison, the national average for MSW streams is 7 percent resources recovery, 29 percent recycling, and 64 percent landfill.
- Over the next 12 years, beginning in three months: two of the six RRFs will be privately owned; two others will be privately owned unless the quasi-public authorities involved exercise their options to purchase at fair market value; and two will be owned publicly.
- Concurrent with the pending and possible ownership changes, long-term municipal service and energy sales contracts of 20 years and more are coming to an end. This frees up all parties (i.e., municipalities, facility owners, CRRA, and others) to reconsider their options in regard to solid waste, unsettling the status quo.
- Since the first facilities began operation in 1988, a lot has changed in the world of solid waste, perhaps most significantly:
 - 1) the state law and approach to recycling and source reduction efforts;
 - 2) the U.S. Supreme Court decisions on flow control, distinguishing between public and private RRFs;
 - 3) the energy market; and
 - 4) changing technology.
- The state solid waste management plan, amended by DEP in 2006, is intended to guide all aspects of the state's approach to solid waste management.

Key Points

- Concerns about the private ownership of the RRFs located in Connecticut include (but are not limited to) the impact on:
 - costs to municipalities;
 - achievement of the state's recycling goals; and
 - exportation of Connecticut waste to out-of-state landfills and importation of out-of-state waste into Connecticut, and the resulting increase in waste transport throughout the state.

- A key factor in assessing these impacts and others is the competitiveness of the solid waste disposal market, accompanied by the question of whether the market is the desired level of control over solid waste disposal in Connecticut.