

**Testimony of John A. Stewart, Ph.D.,
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**Energy and Technology Committee
March 7, 2013**

**In Opposition to Raised Bill No. 6531 AN ACT PRESERVING AND
RETAINING THE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS OF IN-STATE RESOURCES
RECOVERY FACILITIES.**

This act seeks to preserve the “environmental benefits” of RRF services, so let’s look at the benefits **and costs** of these services. The only environmental benefit is the reduction of the volume of trash so that landfills will be filled more slowly. This same benefit could be obtained by more efficient and extensive recycling efforts within the state and the recycling effort would not only have much less environmental impact than burning trash, it would create additional jobs. Although some electrical energy is gained from the burning of the trash, it is not an economically competitive source of energy, in that it requires subsidies, and extending what is recycled will save more energy than that generated by burning them.

What are the costs associated with the continuation of RRF services?
Environmental costs are substantial. Burned trash produces a toxic “ash” that must be buried in landfills. Although current landfills have liners, these are not fail-proof and will leak at some time in the future, which will release their toxic leachates into the ground and its aquifers. Burning trash also releases toxic air pollutants. The carbon dioxide and the oxides of nitrogen are potent green house gases, which we should be minimizing, not promoting. Other air pollutants include carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter. These pollutants are produced by many sources, but the RRF in the south end of Hartford is by far the largest source of sulfur dioxide in that area. I recently completed analysis of possible health consequences of pollution sources in Hartford, which has been submitted for publication in the *Journal of the National Medical Association*.^{1,2} In particular, I found strong evidence that the estimated level of sulfur dioxide (especially downwind from a source) caused a significant increase in the number of breathing problems reported for a household member. The health information was obtained from a random survey of over 1000 individuals in Hartford.

Thus, there is a human health cost associated with this RRF in particular, but this cost is not distributed fairly to all racial and income groups within our

state. A previous study in the *New England Journal of Public Policy* showed that the RRFs and their related ash landfills are more likely to be in poor and minority areas.³ So continuing to support the use of RRFs in Connecticut is a **continuation of a policy of environmental injustice**. We should be ending this policy, not propping it up with additional fees on our electricity bills.

For these reasons I urge you to take whatever funds are used to support continued use of RRFs and channel them towards actions, such as expanded recycling and truly renewable energy production, which will help Connecticut continue its national leadership in environmental sustainability.

Sources (available upon request)

- ¹ Stewart, John, Mark Mitchell, Victor Edgerton, and Robert VanCott.
Submitted “Environmental Justice and Health Effects of Urban Air Pollution.”
Journal of the National Medical Association.
- ² Mitchell, Mark, Victor Edgerton, Robert Van Cott, and John Stewart.
2004 “Criteria air pollutants and respiratory problems in Hartford, Connecticut.” Presented at the American Public Health Association’s annual meeting in Washington, DC.; November, 2004).
- ³ Black, Tim and John Stewart
2001 “Burning and Burying in Connecticut: Are Regional Solutions to Solid Waste Disposal Equitable?” *New England Journal of Public Policy*, 16:15-34.

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