

## Environmental Justice

### NWRA POSITION

Everyone should be able to live and work in a healthy and clean environment. Advancing environmental justice involves ensuring that all people receive fair treatment and the opportunity for meaningful involvement in environmental decision-making processes, regardless of their race, color, national origin or income level.

### CONTEXT

As an industry, waste and recycling has been at the forefront of addressing the environmental justice issue long before it was even known by that term through its work with local communities going back to as early as the 1980s. While other industries were receiving passes on issues such as siting facilities, the waste and recycling industry was not and as a result has been successfully working with local communities through host community agreements and similar arrangements for decades.

Transfer stations, modern environmentally protective landfills and facilities that handle recycling, organics, waste-to-energy and scrap metal are essential to protect human health and the environment because they provide safe and secure processing and management of waste materials, including those that remain after reuse, recovery and recycling. As such, these facilities provide a valuable and necessary public service.

Today's modern solid waste landfills are highly sophisticated engineered facilities that are subject to extensive and evolving federal, state and local environmental, health and safety requirements. The waste industry has made significant investments to ensure landfills are designed, constructed and operated to ensure the protection of human health and the environment. Accordingly, the "garbage dump" of the past is no more; the modern landfill affords significant safeguards to surrounding communities.

Like landfills, waste-to-energy facilities are subject to stringent federal, state and local environmental, health and safety requirements and have advanced technology to control emissions while generating clean renewable energy. Scientific studies have shown that waste-to-energy facilities do not adversely affect human health and that the highly regulated conversion process has a negligible impact on air quality compared to emissions from trucking and other traffic-related air pollution.

Finally, site-selection and operation of landfills, transfer stations, waste-to-energy facilities and recycling facilities rely on effective communications with the communities in which these facilities are located. NWRA members routinely engage with local planning boards

and community organizations, striving to ensure operational transparency and foster community involvement in how these facilities are managed.

## **POLICY**

NWRA members are committed to providing environmentally safe and effective services while supporting the communities they serve. Our members recognize the imperative of early and continuous engagement with potentially impacted communities and the importance of addressing their views in environmental decision-making processes. The industry has found effective outreach and communication with potentially impacted communities leads to improved coordination in pursuing programs to benefit the communities in which these facilities operate.

As a result, NWRA members have been responsive to stakeholders by:

- Working with communities to meet high standards of environmental performance, to support a healthy living environment in the communities it operates while providing essential local, regional and nationwide public services.
- Investing in and partnering with the communities they operate in, including civic involvement, community support and local charity programs.
- Developing and investing in new truck fleet technologies that use clean alternative fuels such as natural gas, renewable natural gas and electricity thereby reducing vehicular air emissions such as NOx emissions and diesel particulate matter. (For example, currently, approximately 30 percent of existing collection vehicles run on natural gas and purchasers of new vehicles are going increasingly with natural gas and electric. The industry estimates by switching the entire industry fleet of more than 115,000 vehicles to alternative fuels could reduce diesel fuel consumption by as much as two billion gallons per year.)
- Implementing improved landfill gas collection technologies to reduce odor and greenhouse gas emissions from landfills, above and beyond what might be required for regulatory compliance.
- Installing and operating air pollution control systems at waste-to-energy facilities to meet or exceed air emission standards. These emissions are monitored, and periodically tested to confirm compliance with air emission standards.
- Implementing renewable energy projects to make beneficial use of the energy from landfill gas and renewable natural gas.

The waste and recycling industry is dedicated to enhancing routine outreach and engagement to pursue meaningful improvements, programs and events that communities value – ranging from local education support to training programs, support for youth sports programs, specific requested community health and beautification projects and more. Working in and with its communities, the industry is responsive to the unique needs of its community partners.

## **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- The waste and recycling industry provides essential community services that are integral to our nation's system of waste management and designed to ensure protection of the environment and public health.
- The industry is committed to partnering with the communities it serves regardless of their residents' race, color, national origin or income level to respond to environmental, health and other social concerns, including through the adoption of cleaner vehicles and emissions reduction technologies, mitigation of environmental and health concerns and response to unique stakeholder needs as determined by local communities.