



New York City Environmental Justice Alliance

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For Immediate Release: Wednesday, October 2, 2013 at 12:00 PM
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NEW COALITION CHALLENGES MAYORAL CANDIDATES ON ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

Eyeing Bloomberg Legacy, New Campaign Launches to Urge Progress on Increasing Good Jobs, Recycling and Justice in the Commercial Waste Industry

New York, NY—A new coalition of labor, environmental justice, community and other advocates convened on the steps of City Hall to launch a new campaign to tackle the problems in the commercial solid waste industry. This is the first time that such a broad-based coalition has united around recommendations to improve commercial solid waste management in New York City.

The *Transform Don't Trash NYC* coalition released a [new report](#) that outlines how the commercial waste industry is highly polluting, costly, inefficient, disproportionately burdensome on low-income communities and communities of color, and dangerous and exploitative for workers. Dozens of advocates gathered with elected officials to present the report as a roadmap to creating a more environmentally and economically sustainable city to mayoral candidates.

“This administration and the next must make progress on solving the city’s commercial waste problem,” said Matt Ryan, Executive Director of ALIGN. “There’s an incredible opportunity to reduce waste and pollution, create cleaner and healthier communities for all New Yorkers, lift thousands waste industry workers and their families out of poverty, and create tens of thousands of new, quality jobs in recycling and recycling-reliant industries.”

Restaurants, offices and businesses send nearly 2 million tons of commercial waste to landfills and incinerators each year. New York City estimates that over 90% of commercial waste could be recycled or composted, but currently, less than half that percentage is. Poor recycling rates add to excessive pollution and greenhouse gasses in what is already “America’s Dirtiest City.”

Coalition members credited the current administration with increasing environmental sustainability in recent years, noting that the City has reduced pollution by increasing green space, expanded residential recycling programs, and developed a plan to more fairly distribute waste facilities throughout the five boroughs.

"For over 25 years, NYC has buried low income communities of color under mountains of commercial waste," said Eddie Bautista, Executive Director of the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance. "The time has come for NYC to stop burying communities - as well as burying potential recycling jobs. While the Bloomberg Administration has begun addressing the need to expand commercial waste, the next mayor can really jump-start a commercial recycling program that both increases long-neglected recycling work opportunities, while continuing to decrease our carbon footprint."

Speakers pointed to the current inefficient collection system as one major contributor of pollution. While a handful of carters struggle to maintain high labor and environmental standards, hundreds of companies deploy thousands of dirty trucks to service customers along crisscrossing routes, needlessly wearing down city streets and emitting pollution that damages truck drivers' and residents' health.

The commercial waste industry is also plagued by low wages, racial disparities, and poor health and safety. Between 2006 and 2011, real wages fell for new hires in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Staten Island, where new hires earned just below \$20,000 in 2011.

George Miranda, President of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Joint Council 16 stated, "This industry has become a 'Wild West.' Unsafe and sometimes illegal operators are driving a race to the bottom in wages and health and safety. Brothers and sisters today is the day we make New York City a better place to live and a better place to WORK!"

"Our current commercial waste system is a free-for-all that harms communities and workers and squanders economic opportunities," said Gavin Kearney, Director of Environmental Justice at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. "Stronger and smarter standards are urgently needed to improve our environmental health and support local workers and businesses."

Commercial waste facilities and waste truck garages are primarily located in low-income communities and communities of color, disproportionately burdening these communities with pollution and its negative health impacts, such as asthma. While Manhattan produces 41% of commercial waste, only 2% of transfer facilities are located in Manhattan.

"The urgency of climate change has moved us to work towards zero waste," said Elizabeth Yeampierre, Executive Director of UPROSE. "In communities of color like Sunset Park that house a waste transfer station, a marine transfer station and a recycling facility, we believe it is everyone's responsibility to alleviate the burdens in environmental justice communities and start working collectively to reduce the commercial waste stream and its impacts across the board."

Frances Lucerna, Executive Director of El Puente, said “We urge a new administration to champion a ‘new chapter’ in the movement for a just, equitable and clean NYC. North Brooklyn currently handles about 40% of the city’s waste, and thousands of polluting trucks pass through our residential streets every day. The health and economic security of our residents, as well as the vibrancy and sustainability of our community would benefit immeasurably from an overhaul of the City’s commercial waste system.”

“For decades, the transport of trash has had a detrimental effect on our air quality and on the health of New Yorkers,” said Jeff Seyler, President & CEO of the American Lung Association of the Northeast. “While we have made great progress in cleaning up municipal fleets and making our air healthier to breathe, our commercial waste system is still a major source of air pollution. For the sake of the many New Yorkers who suffer from lung diseases like asthma, COPD and lung cancer, we ask the next administration to heed our collective call to address this important public health issue.”

Advocates also highlighted the job creation potential in increasing recycling rates. Recycling creates 20 times more jobs than landfilling and incinerating waste. The report estimates that more than 15,000 jobs could be created in the city by increasing recycling rates.

Transform Don’t Trash NYC outlines recommendations that are actionable now to improve environmental standards, labor standards, and accountability in the industry. Members of the coalition pointed to franchising—a mechanism being used by more and more cities around the country—as an effective way to transform the commercial waste industry in order to increase recycling rates, reduce truck emissions, more equitably distribute waste handling across the city, improve the safety and quality of jobs in waste hauling and recycling, and ensure the new jobs created are good jobs. The coalition called on the current administration and the mayoral candidates to make a commitment to take action on the city’s commercial waste problem.

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The NYC Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA) was founded in 1991 to link grassroots organizations from low-income communities of color in their struggle for environmental justice. NYC-EJA coalesces its member organizations around common issues to advocate for improved environmental conditions and against inequitable burdens by coordinating campaigns designed to affect systemic change through City and State policies.

The Transform Don’t Trash NYC coalition is a growing coalition dedicated to transforming New York City’s commercial trash industry to reduce waste and pollution, foster clean and healthy communities for all New Yorkers, and create good jobs.