



# CONNECTICUT RESOURCES RECOVERY AUTHORITY

**COMMENTARY**

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## **Let's Keep Our Trash-to-Energy Plants Serving Connecticut Expanded Recycling Will Help, but Disposal Will Remain Essential (From the *Connecticut Post*)**

By **MARK A. LAURETTI**

The *Connecticut Post*'s Jan. 1 editorial ("Doubling recycling is doable for state") correctly pointed out a serious problem: Connecticut produces more trash than our in-state disposal facilities currently handle.

In fact, we already must send upwards of 400,000 tons of trash each year to out-of-state landfills. That reason alone warrants support for the Department of Environmental Protection's new solid waste management plan and its calling to nearly double the state's recycling rate by 2024.

Connecticut currently recycles about 30 percent of its solid waste; DEP wants to increase that rate to 58 percent. The CRRA will do everything we can to help the state reach that goal. In fact, we're trying to expand recycling by building a new state-of-the-art recycling facility in Hartford and we are preparing to develop a new facility in Stratford.

The CRRA is charged by statute with implementing the solid waste management plan, and we need to make sure DEP and the General Assembly, which will be asked to approve legislation in support of this plan, are cognizant of the entire situation.

With regard to the bottle bill, for four years CRRA has been trying to recover those unclaimed deposits to fund recycling and other solid waste-related activities.

Currently, that money – estimated to be as much as \$16 million or more a year – goes into the pockets of the bottlers and distributors.

I believe enhancing recycling activities would be a much better use of those monies.

Most important is the possibility that just about all of our state's disposal capacity could vanish in the next few years.

There are six trash-to-energy plants in Connecticut – CRRA plants in Bridgeport, Hartford, Wallingford and Preston, with other facilities in Bristol and Lisbon. Under conditions in their current operating agreements, five of those six plants could revert to private control by 2015, with only CRRA's plant in Hartford owned outright by the public sector.

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Those five plants could become open to anyone willing to pay top dollar, whether those customers are from Connecticut or Massachusetts or Rhode Island or New York. First of those plants to transfer is Bridgeport. Our contract is set to expire on Dec. 31, 2008. The Bridgeport region pays the highest tip fees in the state at \$78 per ton, with an all-time high of \$89 a ton. Even with increased recycling, Connecticut would still be forced to send more trash to out-of-state landfills.

Not only is landfilling DEP's least-preferred method of managing trash, but any permitting of new facilities would take years. Exporting will put more trucks on our already-choked highways and relying on out-of-state facilities can only drive the cost of trash disposal higher and put Connecticut at the mercy of the marketplace.

When it comes to managing our trash, let's make sure we do everything we can to keep Connecticut self-sufficient. Unlike what deregulation has done to electric rates, Connecticut trash-to-energy plants must serve Connecticut residents.

*Mark A. Lauretti is Mayor of Shelton and a member of the CRRA Board of Directors.*