

# Blue Mountain Center Statement

August 2007

A group of recycling pioneers gathered at the Blue Mountain Center in upper New York State, June 1-4, 2007, to begin archiving an oral history of the modern recycling movement. During the last two days of this retreat, they developed some key messages and identified immediate actions needed to stem the flow of wasted materials in our economy and sustain the planet for future generations. These actions – to be shared with other recycling leaders, elected officials, activists, and the public – are essential to reduce greenhouse gases, conserve resources for the planet, move us toward a zero waste economy, and protect the public's health. The Stop Waste Program of Alameda County, CA provided a grant to allow the assembled recyclers to spend an extra 2 days in developing the following policy agenda for consideration by officials, businesspeople and citizens.

The recyclers gathered at Blue Mountain Center request feedback on the policy options and discussions presented below. Please send comments and suggestions to **Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR) at [recyclingpioneers@ilsr.org](mailto:recyclingpioneers@ilsr.org), or call Neil Seldman at 202-898-1610 x210.**

## Goals

- ◆ **Reduce** our use of wasteful or harmful products and packaging and engage our creativity to create sustainable alternatives.
- ◆ **Restore the health of our soil with composting.**
- ◆ **Don't reward wasting.** Change incentives in our economy to **support Zero Waste.**
- ◆ **Renew communities with local green industry** and green jobs, which includes recycling-based businesses.

## Detailed Policies for Resource Independence to Help Accomplish Goals

1. **New Rules for Businesses** – These are needed to spur clean production and include product and material bans, international trade agreements, export bans. At a minimum, local governments should adopt ordinances requiring businesses to separate their discarded materials into categories needed to participate fully in local recycling programs.
2. **Incentives and Economics** – The current system that subsidizes wasting of materials needs to be changed. Changes are needed to garbage rate structures (e.g., institute pay-as-you-throw fees); tax policies; financing of solid waste and recycling facilities; renewable energy portfolio standards and green power financing and tax credits to exclude “municipal solid wastes” as a source of renewable energy; and adoption of surcharges on wasting at landfills and incinerators to fund the expansion of needed reuse, recycling and composting facilities. States should adopt energy and tax credits and other financial incentives for reuse, recycling and composting.
3. **Products** – Industry needs to redesign products, processes and packaging for clean production and more efficient use of materials. Federal, state and local governments should adopt policies, bans, incentives and mandates to encourage or require industry to accomplish this. Plans should be developed to implement bans and mandates. Businesses should encourage their suppliers to help them meet Zero Waste to landfills and incinerators and green community development goals with supply chain management tools. Green Chemistry approaches should be encouraged.
4. **Education, Training and Research** – The current reuse and recycling industry in America is as large as the automobile industry. However, education, training and research are needed to support innovations for achieving Zero Waste and healthy sustainable communities. We need to invest financial, labor, and intellectual resources now for the future. The federal government should work with other nations to document data on successes around the world for all to replicate. Consumer campaigns should be developed to clearly communicate to industry what the public wants.
5. **Planning and Permitting** – States should require local governments to develop plans for the next 20 years of infrastructure needed to achieve Zero Waste to landfills and incinerators. Composting capacity should be identified within counties originating the materials, or firm long-term commitments should be obtained to use facilities in other counties. Communities should be encouraged to develop Zero Waste Community Plans to determine the best combination of policies, programs and facilities to pursue.

The US EPA developed a Waste Reduction Model (WARM) to assist solid waste managers determine the greenhouse gas impacts of their waste management practices. WARM compares the greenhouse gas and energy impacts of landfilling, recycling, incineration, composting, and source reduction. However, it has many limitations, uses a number of false assumptions, and

overlooks key issues. This powerful tool needs to be improved. For one, it should factor in additional benefits of composting organics, such as reduction of the use of fertilizers, pesticides and water conservation. It also needs to integrate all upstream implications of reuse, recycling and composting and adjust assumptions about the capture rate of landfill gases based on recent data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Climate change inventories should count reuse, recycling and composting contributions to sequester carbon to reduce greenhouse gases, not landfilling or incineration.

Air quality control districts should adopt regulations that encourage composting, not landfilling or incineration of waste. States should encourage the siting of composting facilities on farms and the use of compost products by farmers. The federal government should work to develop international protocols to certify recycling processing facilities globally and ban the use of non-compliant facilities by American businesses so we don't export harm. International trade agreements should allow recyclables to be traded freely and include Zero Waste standards. The international agreement on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) should be a priority for implementation.

6. **Organics Composting** -We've lost half the carbon in our soils, yet we're burying our organics (yard trimmings and food scraps) in landfills and burning these materials in incinerators. Landfills are the single largest source of human-created methane gas and contribute significantly to climate change. We need to get organics out of landfills and back to the soil. The federal government (e.g., U.S. Department of Agriculture) should promote returning urban organics to the soil.
7. **Landfills and Incinerators** – States should adopt moratoria on all new landfill and incinerator permits until gaps in technical issues and financial assurances in federal regulations are adequately addressed. States and local governments should adopt landfill and incinerator surcharges to fund the Zero Waste infrastructure needed.

**Federal, state and local governments, businesses and environmental groups should adopt these goals to guide us through the challenges ahead.**

Blue Mountain Center Participants

Mike Anderson  
Laura Anthony  
Richard Anthony  
Bert Ball  
Gretchen Brewer  
Dan Knapp  
Linda Christopher

Penny Hansen  
Jon Michael Huls  
Linda Knapp  
Tania Levy  
Gary Liss  
Rod Muir  
Brenda Platt

Tom Padia  
Mathew Reice  
Maurice Sampson  
Neil Seldman  
Armen Stepanian  
David Tam  
Mary Lou Van Deventer