

FACT SHEET: Trash Incinerator Closures 2000-2023

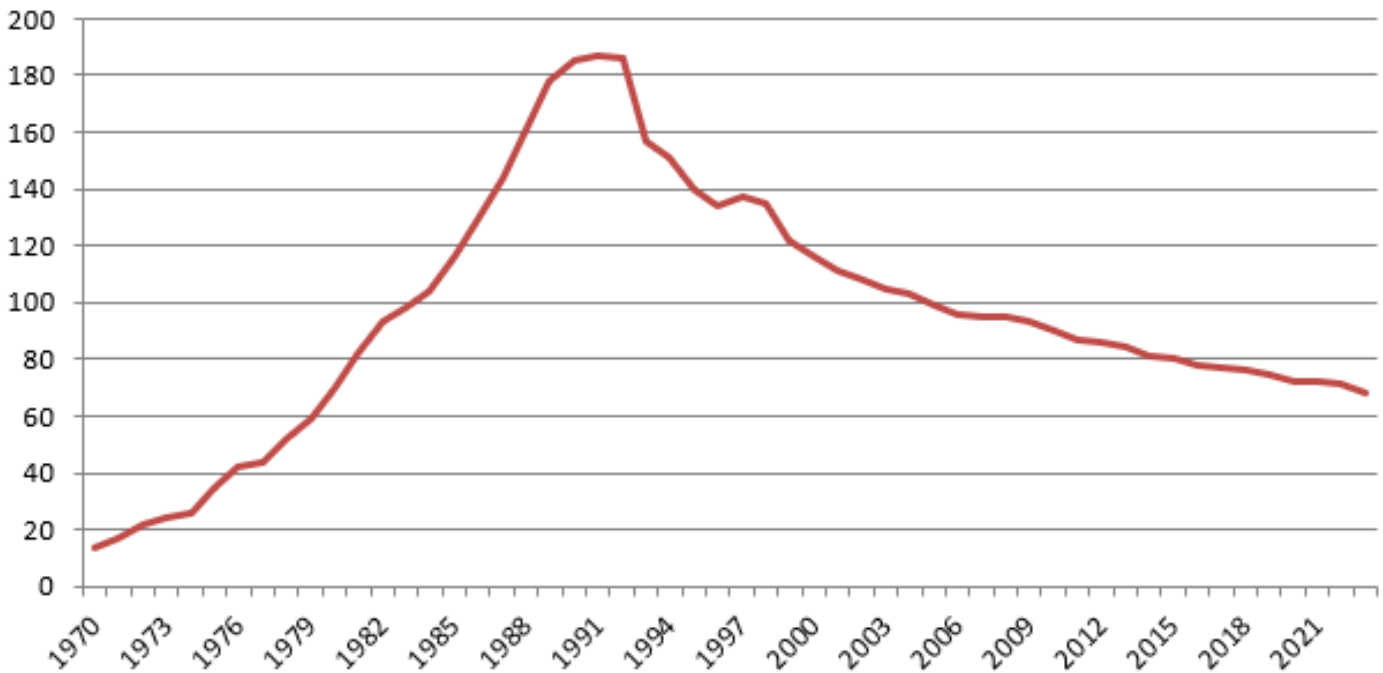
www.beyondburning.org/incineration

Between 2000 and 2023, 50 trash incinerators in the U.S. closed for good. Their average age when they closed was just 25. (See chart at end.) Only 66 remain as of Nov. 2023.

Despite hundreds of attempts to build new waste incinerators, no new incinerator has been built at a new site since 1995. However, one major new incinerator was built adjacent to an existing incinerator in West Palm Beach, Florida, and a handful of others were rebuilt or expanded.

The trend is toward incinerators closing as they age. Few have made it to or past their 40th birthday. Most close much sooner. As of 2023, two incinerators have made it to the ripe old age of 48: Wheelabrator Saugus in Massachusetts (experiencing ongoing major noise problems and other signs of aging), and the tiny city-owned refuse-derived fuel burner in Ames, Iowa. Covanta Niagara (NY) and the small Hampton/NASA steam plant in VA turned 43 in 2023. Only two others have made it into their 40s: the Miami-Dade incinerator in Doral, Florida (which closed in early 2023 after an out-of-control 3-week fire), and Pinellas County, Florida. Several others are now in their late 30s.

Number of Operating Commercial Trash Incinerators in the U.S.



Why do trash incinerators close early?

The following describes the reasons for the trash incinerator closures from 2011-2023:

New Hanover County WASTEC, 1984-2011

Wilmington, North Carolina

Why did it close?

Consistently ran a deficit. County sought contractor to take over waste operations (went with R3 Environmental LLC which couldn't get financing for dirty MRF & "clean energy" burning), and ultimately decided to close it. County considered hiring Covanta to refurbish it. Stack didn't meet current wind-resistance standards and would have needed a rebuild too.

What was the end result?

County demolished it. Investing in a clean MRF and a C&D recycling facility.

Maine Energy Recovery Company (MERC), 1987-2012

Biddeford, Maine

Why did it close?

PPA's above-market rate reverted to market rate in 2007 and would expire in 2012. After decades of complaints about trucks, odor, etc., Biddeford City Council voted in July 2012 to buy the property for \$6.65 million and close it to stimulate economic growth in the area.

What was the end result?

Demolished in Q1 2013. Waste disposal shifted to other incinerators and landfills in Maine.

Red Wing Resource Recovery Facility, 1982-2013

Red Wing, Minnesota

Why did it close?

State would not enforce flow control law, so incinerator was operating at \$500k/yr loss.

What was the end result?

Converted to recycling/compost center and transfer station. Xcel used a state grant to buy a shredder for the municipal site; non-recycled waste is now going to Xcel Red Wing.

Jackson County Resource Recovery Facility, 1987-2013

Jackson, Michigan

Why did it close?

Michigan State Department of Corrections ended contract to buy steam & electricity.

What was the end result?

End of flow control. County hired a recycling coordinator and is amending their Solid Waste Plan.

Wheelabrator Claremont, 1987-2013

Claremont, New Hampshire

Why did it close?

There was lots of citizen action and watchdogging but Wheelabrator claimed economic reasons for closing (remote transportation, small economy of scale, economics of energy and waste).

What was the end result?

Two would-be buyers of the site backed out of sale at auction, at least one was probably discouraged by city council's skepticism about his proposed gasifier. (Their skepticism was probably informed by the long-term critical citizen activism). Wheelabrator is attempting to sell the equipment.

Harrisonburg Resource Recovery Facility, 1982-2014

Harrisonburg, Virginia

Why did it close?

JMU purchased the site on Aug 1, 2015, because the university needed the space for expansion.

What was the end result?

City awarded a demolition contract to Stryker on 2/10/2016. Remaining chiller unit (renamed East Campus Power Plant) probably being run on natural gas.

Wallingford Resource Recovery Facility, 1989-2015

Wallingford, Connecticut

Why did it close?

Recycling efforts in CT reduced the trash supply to the point that Covanta proposed closing it.

What was the end result?

In 12/2014 the towns contracted with Covanta Wallingford agreed to let it convert to a transfer station. In 11/2016 Covanta wanted to close the transfer station and shift the flow to the Bristol facility, but the towns declined to change the contract and it remains a transfer station.

Wheelabrator North Broward County, 1991-2015

Pompano Beach, Florida

Why did it close?

After dissolution of the County's Resource Recovery Board, Wheelabrator lost customers to Sun Bergeron transfer stations. Broward commissioners voted 7-2 to close facility.

What was the end result?

Flow shifted to private facilities, landfill, and to Wheelabrator South Broward which has enough capacity to handle additional flow from the north.

Harford Waste-to-Energy Facility, 1988-2016

Joppa, Maryland

Why did it close?

Army no longer needs their steam (it's building a \$40 million natural gas-fired cogen), so the lease wasn't renewed.

What was the end result?

Closed in March 2016, authority is soliciting bids for demolition.

Wasatch Integrated Energy Recovery Facility, 1986-2017

Layton, Utah

Why did it close?

Had to make \$8 million upgrades to pollution controls and equipment, while Army had reduced interest in buying their steam.

What was the end result?

Closed on May 31, 2017, being replaced with a transfer station and landfilling, and a dirty MRF is planned.

Commerce Refuse to Energy Facility (CREF), 1986-2018

Commerce, California

Why did it close?

Activists defeated bill to allow WTE to qualify for renewable energy credits, and it couldn't negotiate a favorable new power purchase agreement, so it had "insufficient revenues to handle operating costs."

What was the end result?

Closed on June 30, 2018. Waste disposal shifted to landfills.

Covanta Warren Energy, NJ 9/1988 – 3/2019

Oxford Township, New Jersey

Why did it close?

Tip fees too low, couldn't compete with nearby landfill.

What was the end result?

Mothballed in March 2019 for up to two years of temporary shutdown, awaiting better economic conditions.

Greater Detroit Resource Recovery, 1988-2019

Detroit, Michigan

Why did it close?

Community had been complaining of stench for many years, and facility had been cited for exceeding air emission limits more than 750 times within five years. \$23 million upgrades by new owner were not enough to make it efficient. Activists sued over Clean Air Act violations.

What was the end result?

Closed in March 2019. Waste disposal shifted to landfills.

Elk River Energy Recovery Station, 1989-2019

Elk River, MN

Why did it close?

Years of low electricity prices and too little trash volume to operate at capacity.

What was the end result?

Stopped generating electricity in January 2019, closed in March, decommissioning started in the Fall, and demolition in Spring 2020.

Bay County Waste Facility, 1987-2021

Panama City, Florida

Why did it close?

This small 500 ton/day incinerator was not cost effective and they found it was \$20/ton cheaper to close the incinerator and use landfills directly. The county was losing millions of dollars a year. Bay County Commissioner Hamm commented that the county “made more money when it caught on fire,” than it being in operation.

What was the end result?

Closed on January 10, 2021. Site converted to a transfer station to haul to a local landfill.

Pittsfield Resource Recovery Facility, 1981-2022

Pittsfield, Massachusetts

Why did it close?

This tiny 240 ton/day incinerator was sold by Covanta to Community Eco Power in 2019, as Covanta was shedding its smallest facilities, probably because they were so uneconomical. Community Eco Power filed for bankruptcy on June 25, 2021, citing the need to take out loans due to deferred maintenance costs being “a little bit higher than they expected it to be.” Also facing fines from OSHA violations, Casella Waste Management purchased the plant in 2022 and chose to close it for good.

What was the end result?

Closed April 2022. Permit surrendered 5/3/2022. Casella chose to convert the site to a transfer station to haul to their landfills in New York.

Pioneer Valley Resource Recovery Facility, 1988-2022

Agawam, Massachusetts

Why did it close?

This small 400 ton/day incinerator was sold by Covanta to Community Eco Power in 2019, as they were also selling the Pittsfield facility. It was sold again to USA Hauling and Recycling when Community Eco Power went bankrupt in 2021.

What was the end result?

Closed in April 2022 and permit surrendered on April 29, 2022. USA Hauling and Recycling chose to convert the site to a transfer station and haul to incinerators in Connecticut – which is puzzling, since CT’s incinerators are near capacity, the second largest is closing, and Covanta’s Preston, CT incinerator is making room by diverting trash to other incinerators in Massachusetts!

Mid-Connecticut Resource Recovery Facility, 1988-2022

Hartford, CT

Why did it close?

This 2,850 ton/day incinerator burned refuse-derived fuel in an old coal power plant that operated from the late 1940s until 1975. Seeing its days were numbered, the state passed a law in 2014 requiring the owner – a state agency now called the Materials Innovation and Recycling Authority (MIRA) -- by the end of 2017, to come up with three proposals to replace the incinerator. MIRA (formerly the Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority, and still a pro-incinerator agency) proposed three ways to keep burning 1/3rd of Connecticut’s waste: rebuilt the incinerator, let Covanta burn it at their existing facilities, or ship it to burn next in a huge cement kiln in Albany County, NY. The Connecticut Coalition for Environmental and Economic Justice enlisted Energy Justice Network’s support, and we challenged all three proposals, focusing on the most viable. We quickly stopped the plan to burn at the LafargeHolcim cement kiln in New York, getting the cement giant to quickly back down once exposing the proposal, and ultimately getting local and county resolutions and clean air laws passed to prevent it. We questioned Covanta’s

plan as not having the capacity to take this much waste, even if they filled all available space at their incinerators from New England through Pennsylvania. Shockingly, the least likely plan was chosen – to rebuild the incinerator, enlisting a joint venture, Sacyr Rooney – companies with no experience building incinerators. While the state’s intent was for the private sector to fund it, the companies came back in 2020 asking the state and MIRA’s 50-70 contracted towns to foot the \$333 million bill. Unable and unwilling to do so, the state announced they’d simply close the incinerator.

What was the end result?

Closed on July 19, 2022. Most of the waste now being shipped to the Keystone Landfill in Dunmore, PA, and some now being burned at Covanta’s incinerators in Preston, CT and elsewhere. The state environmental agency created a Connecticut Coalition for Sustainable Materials Management and held a series of workshops and meetings on four strategies for Connecticut towns to reduce, reuse, recycle, and compost. Other policies are being put into place to incentivize Zero Waste efforts, including diverting ratepayer “renewable” energy subsidies from incinerators toward Zero Waste projects.

Miami-Dade County Resource Recovery Facility, 1982-2023

Doral, Florida

Why did it close?

In February, 2023, an out-of-control fire burned for three weeks, destroying much of the facility.

What was the end result?

The county is exploring building a new incinerator in a more rural part of the county on the edge of the Everglades. Since this is projected to take about 10 years, even if community opposition doesn’t stop it, the county will likely end up expanding their landfill or shipping to landfills in Central or North Florida. The county is not allowed to continue to develop new buildings without five years of waste disposal capacity, which is the extra impetus for working out a solution that will not take ten years.

Penobscot Energy Recovery Company, 1988-2023

Orrington, Maine

Why did it close?

The largest of three remaining incinerators in Maine closed in May 2023. The Orrington plant has had trouble turning a profit since 2019, after losing a lucrative power-purchase agreement with Versant for the electricity it sold to the grid and after many Maine communities got behind the construction of Fiberight’s failed, experimental waste-to-fuels facility in nearby Hampden, ME. The PERC plant has had numerous fires and has been operating sporadically. Also, one of their two boilers has been out of operation and the plant could not afford to fix it.

What was the end result?

The facility is being put up for a foreclosure auction, which has been postponed several times, sometimes attracting no bidders. In early November 2023, Delta Thermo Energy, having been kicked out of Allentown, PA, Muncy, PA, and other communities since 2014, bought the plant for \$1.5 million only to have their bid fall through when they defaulted on the auction contract, failing to pay the \$100,000 they owed. In mid-November, it was put back up for auction and sold to an outfit that aims to reopen it using gasification, which they also aimed to do with the Claremont, NH incinerator in 2016 before they backed out. Given the condition of the PERC plant, this new buyer’s track record, and the track record of gasification working on municipal solid waste, we expect this latest effort to fail and we’re considering this plant closed until further notice.

Ages of incinerators closed from 2000-2023

State	Location	Facility	Opened	Closed	Age
AK	Sheldon Jackson College	Sitka Waste-to-Energy Facility	1985	2000	15
AK	Juneau	Juneau Incinerator	1986	2004	18
AR	Osceola	Arkansas Municipal Waste to Energy	1980	2004	24
CA	Commerce	Commerce Refuse to Energy Facility	1987	2018	31
CO	Phillips County	Phillips County Incinerator	1997	2004	7
CT	Hartford	Mid-Connecticut Resource Recovery Facility	1988	2022	34
CT	Wallingford	Wallingford Resource Recovery Facility	1989	2015	26
FL	Pompano Beach	Wheelabrator North Broward Inc	1991	2015	24
FL	Key West	Southern Most WTE Facility	1986	2004	18
FL	Panama City	Bay County Waste Facility	1987	2021	34
FL	Doral	Miami-Dade County Resource Recovery Facility	1988	2023	42
GA	Savannah	Savannah Resource Recovery Facility	1987	2008	21
IL	Robbins	Robbins Resource Recovery Facility	1997	2000	3
KS	Norton County	Norton County Incinerator	1995	2001	6
MA	Agawam	Pioneer Valley Resource Recovery Facility	1988	2022	34
MA	Pittsfield	Pittsfield Resource Recovery Facility	1981	2022	41
MD	Joppa	Harford Waste-to-Energy Facility	1988	2016	28
ME	Biddeford	Maine Energy Recovery Company	1987	2012	25
ME	Orrington	Penobscot Energy Recovery Company	1988	2023	35
MI	Dearborn Heights	Central Wayne Energy, L.P.	2000	2003	3
MI	Detroit	Greater Detroit Resource Recovery	1989	2019	30
MI	Jackson	Jackson County Resource Recovery Facility	1987	2013	26
MN	Elk River	Elk River Energy Recovery Station	1989	2019	30
MN	Fergus Falls	Fergus Falls Resource Recovery Facility	1988	2006	18
MN	Red Wing	Red Wing Municipal Solid Waste Facility	1982	2013	31
MS	Moss Point	Pascagoula Energy Recovery Facility	1985	2002	17
MT	Livingston	Park County-Livingston Incinerator	1982	2005	23
NC	Wilmington	New Hanover County WASTE C	1984	2011	27
NH	Candia	Candia Incinerator	1977	2010	33
NH	Litchfield	Litchfield Incinerator	1983	2010	27
NH	Claremont	Wheelabrator Claremont	1987	2013	26
NH	Nottingham	Nottingham Incinerator	1972	2000	28
NH	Ossipee	Ossipee Incinerator	1987	2009	22
NH	Pelham	Pelham Incinerator	1978	2000	22
NH	Sutton	Sutton Incinerator	1979	2001	22
NH	Wilton	Wilton Incinerator	1978	2010	32
NJ	Warren County	Covanta Warren Energy	1988	2019	31
NY	Fire Island	Saltaire Incinerator	1965	2009	44
OR	Coos County	Beaver Hill Incinerator	1978	2012	34
SC	Charleston County	Charleston Resource Recovery Facility	1989	2009	20
SC	Hampton County	Hampton County Incinerator	1985	2002	17
TN	Nashville	Nashville Thermal Transfer Corporation	1974	2002	28
TN	Gallatin	Sumner County Resource Authority	1981	2005	24
TX	Carthage	Panola County Resource Recovery Facility	1986	2000	14
TX	Boys Ranch	Boys Ranch Incinerator	1976	2008	32
TX	Center	City of Center Waste to Energy	1986	2001	15
TX	Cleburne	City of Cleburne Incinerator	1986	2003	17
UT	Layton	Wasatch Energy Systems	1986	2017	31
VA	Harrisonburg	Harrisonburg Resource Recovery Facility	1982	2014	32
WA	Tacoma	Tacoma Waste-to-Energy Facility	1991	2005	14