

Indy recycling center halted, conversation continues

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Production on a controversial Advanced Recycling Center has been temporarily halted while Indianapolis gathers feedback from interested parties.

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The recycling center contract with Covanta Indianapolis, Inc., a waste and energy corporation, has been suspended for 90 days, Mayor Joe Hogsett of Indianapolis announced in a press release.

“Leadership begins with listening, and I believe Indianapolis deserves a true community conversation before we move forward with any waste and recycling plan,” Hogsett said in the release. “I appreciate Covanta’s willingness to agree to this effort as we work toward a long-term solution that best serves our neighborhoods and our environment.”

The Indiana Recycling Coalition supported the mayor, saying the decision will further better recycling goals in the city.

According to the proposal for the Covanta Advanced Recycling Center, Indianapolis residents would send household waste and recyclables to the city’s facility in a single bin to be separated onsite.

When it was proposed, Covanta stated that the ARC would increase recycling in Indianapolis five times, as the city does not have a recycling program in place.

Whether the method would increase recycling in families who don’t already own a separate bin or contaminate materials that would have been properly disposed of ordinarily is questionable, Indiana Recycling Coalition Director Carey Hamilton said.

According to Covanta’s “Frequently Asked Questions” about the ARC proposal, the facility could have recovered as much as 80-90 percent of recyclable material from the mixed-bins, as long as that material met or exceeded industry guidelines and could be sold.

However, the actual recovery rate would be dependent on the amount and quality of paper, plastics and metal found in the bins.

Hamilton argued that gains would be negligible after bottles and cans were mixed in with organic waste.

“The material is very contaminated,” Hamilton said. “If it is pulled out, it’s too contaminated for cities to reuse.”

Hamilton said the IRC had opposed the plan for the ARC since it was proposed two years ago.

Covanta didn’t respond to the IDS’s request for a comment by press time Tuesday.

The agreement for the recycling center was drawn up during former Indianapolis mayor Greg Ballard’s term.

“Unlike most other cities and towns, Indy doesn’t really provide recycling for all of its citizens,” Hamilton said.

But the suspension, she said, is an opportunity to renegotiate what a city-wide recycling program could look like.

Hamilton said she hopes for a city-wide recycling program that makes waste reduction easier and cheaper for all of Indianapolis.

Providing recycling carts for all citizens, as well as increasing education and making more recycling drop-offs for small businesses to use would be a good start, she said.

"We're excited that with the decision in Indianapolis ... we'll be able to have a positive impact and grow recycling in Indiana," Hamilton said.