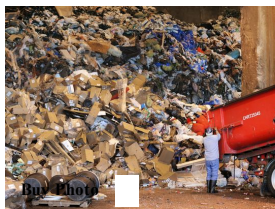


# City's recycling plan needs work

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(Photo: Matt Detrich/The Star 2014 File Photo)

Although Mayor Greg Ballard's office would like you to think otherwise, his agreement with Covanta to combine its waste incinerator operation with a recycling program is not a done deal. A lawsuit in Marion Superior Court is challenging it on the grounds that the \$112 million agreement was forged behind closed doors without public input or a competitive bidding process.

We agree with that challenge, and would add another: the agreement will hamper Indianapolis' recycling potential and the state's vibrant recycling industry.

On the surface, the Covanta contract could look like a good deal for Indianapolis residents. It would have each Indy household throw all waste – including high-quality, clean recyclable resources like glass, aluminum, plastic and paper – into a single bin. Covanta would dump the contents of that bin in with trash and then sort out recyclables. Anything not captured by the sorting process would be fed into Covanta's incinerator, where it would be burned and converted to energy.

There are numerous problems with this proposal.

- The city has changed its tune. The city billed this as a way to engage the community in recycling. However, as a way to suggest that this is just a continuation of its existing agreement with Covanta, in court this week, the city repeatedly said the contract is "simply about the disposal of solid waste."
- It's dirty. Because everything is thrown together, many recyclable products will become contaminated before being separated. Many items would be unusable by firms that use recycled materials. Recyclers have rejected shipments of paper from a similar plant in Montgomery, Ala., due to high contamination.
- It takes recyclables out of the process. Covanta will not separate glass at all, and it will not recycle many plastics that typically are captured in curbside recycling programs.
- It incentivizes incineration. Because Covanta also operates the incinerator that converts trash to energy – and profits from the energy produced by that incineration process – it has an incentive to pass more refuse to the incinerator than to recyclers.
- Taxpayers pay if we don't generate enough trash. If we fail to deliver enough trash to Covanta, the city will be financially penalized. As a result, the city is incentivized to not encourage other forms of recycling.
- Alternatives have not been tried. Communities that have embraced a recycling-for-all approach, making recycling bins available to all citizens at no cost and conducting community education programs, have seen sharp increases in recycling.

Regardless of what the judge rules, Mayor Ballard can still get out of the Covanta contract. Let him know you are opposed to this approach, and would rather see a solution that results in better recycling.

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Indianapolis

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