



Four League Position on Waste

Members of the League of Women Voters in Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady Counties agree that effective policies concerning waste are integral to ensuring the clean water, clean air and healthful environment guaranteed in the Environmental Rights Amendment to the New York State Constitution. We also agree that we're embedded in an ecosystem, and that the land, water, air, energy, waste and biota in our ecosystem are dynamically interrelated. We agree that the concept of waste includes greenhouse gases, that waste management practices can themselves emit these gases, and that we urgently need to reduce the production of these gases in society and in waste management in order to preserve and restore the world's climate. We agree that human health and safety, the wellbeing of wildlife, the preservation and restoration of habitat, and the conservation of primary materials such as timber, minerals, ores, and energy are deeply affected by our practices concerning waste. To protect these resources, the Leagues support policies that promote: the reduction of waste, the reuse of products and materials over disposal, and the responsible management of waste that can't be reused. We agree that our ultimate goal is a circular economy with zero waste.

The four Leagues support, first, the following policies aimed at minimizing the production of waste:

1. Products and buildings designed to accommodate deconstruction and reuse of component parts;
2. The use of durable materials and designs that prioritize longevity in product manufacturing and construction;
3. Support for repair, rather than disposal, of products;
4. Reduction of single-use plastics and items that cannot be recycled, and promotion of reusable packaging for products;
5. Limitation of greenhouse gas emissions and processes that produce them, such as the burning of fossil fuels, excessive fertilizer use, disposal of items containing refrigerants in a way that causes those refrigerants to leak, reliance on landfills for organic waste disposal; and
6. Regular monitoring of sources of potential greenhouse gas leaks and speedy fixes of leaks in lines carrying greenhouse gases (such as methane and refrigerants), and reduction of fugitive emissions from solid waste landfills, wastewater treatment plants, and appliances.

We also support the following policies aimed at facilitating the transfer of discarded items and components to entities that can use them:

1. The development and strengthening of easy-to-participate-in civic infrastructures for:
 - a. Recycling items to extract useful material for reuse in new products; and
 - b. Collecting, processing, and transferring reusable items to new owners, including excess edible food from restaurants, grocers, and farms to groups addressing food insecurity; and
2. The expansion of community-based operations and facilities (e.g., composting, anaerobic digestion, and biochar pyrolysis) that enable communities to create useful products out of non-toxic organic waste, and the diversion of non-toxic organic waste from landfills (where it can produce fugitive methane emissions), towards beneficial use through these processes.

For items that cannot be reused or redistributed, the four Leagues support waste management policies that promote:

1. An end to the processing of hazardous waste in ways that can spread its toxicity, including the use of incineration for waste that contains toxins;
2. Careful recovery, processing, and safe disposal of hazardous materials in the waste stream, including in biosolids and digestate byproducts of sewage treatment and biodigesters, and at concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs);
3. Careful capture and safe disposal of greenhouse gases, including refrigerants from products at time of disposal, and methane and nitrous oxide from large producers, including industrial sites, landfills, and CAFOs;
4. Corporate responsibility with public oversight for the end-of-life processing of products and packaging, including all related costs;
5. Limited miles of waste transport from its source to where it is processed and stored, with communities encouraged to take responsibility for their waste by, as much as possible, locating needed facilities within their boundaries;
6. Collaboration among communities in the siting of regional high-tech waste management facilities as needed to support reuse and recycling;
7. Environmental Justice in the siting of waste facilities and provision of services; and
8. Easy resident access to legal and responsible waste disposal methods.

To reinforce these efforts, we also support:

1. Green procurement policies that boost the market for products made with recycled, recyclable, and non-toxic deconstructable content;
2. The expansion of opportunities to purchase items with either reusable, returnable, or purchaser-provided packaging;
3. Adequate monitoring and enforcement of waste regulations;
4. A rapid transition away from fossil fuels to renewables, and away from high global warming potential (GWP) refrigerant gases to low GWP refrigerant gases;
5. The transformation of wastewater treatment plants from simply waste processing centers to facilities that emphasize the capturing of beneficial products (e.g., biogas) while ensuring removal of hazardous waste before returning to the environment;
6. Reduction in the use of CAFOs and promotion of more sustainable farming methods;
7. Opposition to corporate secrecy about the toxicity of their products and processes; and
8. The embedding of sustainability principles into public information campaigns, school curricula and licensure certification programs.

The four Leagues support direct involvement of citizens and local governments at all stages of planning, development, operation, and monitoring of waste management plans and projects. The consumer should be educated to exercise care in purchasing, to demand quality products, to participate in reuse policies, to recycle, and to resist throw-away cultural practices. Standards for operation of these facilities should be established and enforced by the public sector, whether actual operations are conducted by private or public entities.

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