



January 28th, 2021

Dear Chair Long and House Climate & Energy Committee Members:

Sierra Club is writing to ask for your support for amendment [A19](#) or [A20](#) to the 100% bill HF 278. The effect of this amendment would be to say that garbage burning at the Hennepin Energy Resource Center (HERC) does not count as renewable energy like solar and wind energy. We understand it would not affect other facilities. But we must begin to stop putting waste incineration on an equal footing with truly renewable energy.

[Trash incineration can have a devastating impact on the health of people nearby a facility.](#)

Incinerators are large emitters of toxic air pollution like heavy metals, nitrogen oxides (NOx) and Particulate Matter that are linked to a variety of health problems including asthma attacks, heart and lung disease. Communities near the plant are often environmental justice communities - communities of color and low-income communities.

The Hennepin Energy Resource Center (HERC), in downtown Minneapolis, is the largest municipal solid waste (MSW) incinerator in the state. It burns 1,200 tons of waste per day and is located between the Harrison & Near North neighborhoods of North Minneapolis. Over 48 percent of the community surrounding the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC) are people of color, many living in a median household income of less than \$35,000 a year. North Minneapolis residents experience the **highest rates of asthma** related hospitalizations in the state, **more than five times the average** for Minnesotans.

Community members have been calling for the closure of the HERC for years due to health impacts of this facility and the **cumulative impacts** of many sources of pollution located in North Minneapolis. Subjecting the highest concentration of people of color in Minnesota to a disproportionate share of pollution from multiple sources is the definition of environmental racism.

[Minnesota law currently provides incentives to trash incineration by allowing utilities to count them as renewable energy in meeting the state's renewable energy standard.](#) This encourages more trash burning and discourages reducing and recycling waste. Zero Waste Initiatives are a much more effective use of resources. According to Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) [three to five times more energy can be "saved through alternative strategies such as waste prevention, reuse, recycling, and composting than can be generated by burning."](#)

Incineration emits carbon, so it would not count as a carbon-free resource in this bill, yet it is listed next to wind and solar energy as a renewable energy resource.

In the midst of a pandemic where 7.5% of COVID-19 deaths have been among Black Minnesotans whereas Black Americans make up about 7% of the state's population as whole, we must be conscious of how our decisions around air quality & pollution have lasting implications in BIPOC communities across the Twin Cities.

Sierra Club supports fixing the trash incineration loophole in our renewable energy laws by removing mixed municipal solid waste incineration from the definition of renewable energy. Removing the HERC incinerator is a first step and would ensure this polluting facility is not counted as a renewable energy as we set new renewable benchmarks to ensure Minnesota utilities are investing in new wind and solar.

Sincerely,

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