

Another View: S.F. Mayor Newsom was off-base on gasification

By Mike Hart

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Being mayor of San Francisco often means you get your opinions published even when you are off-base. The recent commentary by San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, co-authored by Teamster Robert Morales, is a prime example.

While Newsom correctly notes that landfills are bad, he misstates why. It's not because they prevent recycling; it's because every ton of landfilled trash emits 23 tons of CO₂ or its equivalent. The International Panel on Climate Change found that few landfills capture these gases, with the best landfills capturing only 20 percent. We need to convert these gases to energy, not release them into the atmosphere.

Contrary to Newsom's assertion, every ton of landfilled waste does not create 71 tons of "upstream" waste. The mayor lifted his assertion from a Sierra Club zero-waste paper citing a 1992 U.S. Office of Technology Assessment background paper.

But Newsom and the Sierra Club failed to notice that the paper does not support the claim or deal with municipal waste. Reducing waste is laudable; misleading the public is not.

Newsom inexcusably labels a wide array of thermal technologies as "really just glorified incineration." But these technologies could not be more different. Whereas incineration creates smoke and ash, gasification can convert waste into new fuels without burning, without emissions and without producing waste.

Newsom claims we can squeeze 34 new jobs out of every 10,000 tons of waste composted. Newsom fails to reveal how much garbage costs will rise to pay those new employees or that composting releases significant greenhouse gases – especially at commercial scales – while doing nothing to solve our energy problems.

Give union workers the choice between being well paid to run gasifiers, a clean source of domestic power that reduce greenhouse gases and eliminate landfill costs, or picking bits of glass and used diapers out of compost destined for some vineyards.

President Barack Obama has recognized the opportunities presented by technologies such as gasification that can cleanly recycle waste while reducing our need for fossil fuels. It's time for Newsom to put our environment above his desire for union contributions. We need an environmental solution to our energy and waste problems. Gasification, not highly paid composting, provides the answer.

Mike Hart is the president and CEO of Sierra Energy, a developer of renewable waste to energy technologies based in Davis. www.sierraenergycorp.com

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EricSoil wrote on 01/14/2010 12:00:01 PM:

Not sure how you get 23 tons of carbon dioxide from one ton of waste, seems to violate certain laws of physics and chemistry!

[Recommend \(0\)](#)



intelligentreader wrote on 01/07/2010 10:03:10 AM:

The EPA defines gasification as incineration. The people who stand to make money from these technologies are the ones saying otherwise, and making false claims that high heat technologies are clean, renewable, and/or environmental. Follow their money. SF is showing that recycling is the best way to go. Not because of union contributions, but because it works, is more environmental than destroying resources that have to be then mined or manufactured again, and is cheaper than destroying resources with high heat. We can easily keep organic matter out of landfills, compost it using low heat digesters that not only capture usable gas, but leave a final product that provides nutrients to our soils and help them capture carbon. Who is paying Mr. Hart to perpetuate his lies? Or is he just this unbelievably ignorant? Clearly he is threatened by San Francisco's success and spewing lies because his technology can't win when compared to zero waste.

[Recommend \(3\)](#)



sierrasig wrote on 01/03/2010 01:35:19 PM:

Gasification and incineration are two totally different technologies, saying they are the same is simply showing profound ignorance on the subject. There are technologies available today that would allow the gasification of any waste and turn it into clean syngas (far cleaner than natural gas) with zero waste products remaining and zero emissions from the process. That is NOT what Gavin Newsom wants to hear. Composting has its place, but it simply cannot be considered a serious solution to waste disposal.

[Recommend \(5\)](#)



howardroarke wrote on 01/03/2010 12:28:37 PM:

S.F. Mayor was off-base on "insert any position he's ever taken here."

[Recommend \(0\)](#)



bcooper530 wrote on 01/03/2010 10:48:39 AM:

Beware of the self serving environmentalist picking out your lifeboats. Have you seen the new WWF TV add. saying the polar bears are in trouble, so please send money, every month. But the polar bear isn't in trouble and doing just fine with their numbers increasing. The only thing in trouble is the WWF bank account and telling the truth when raising money from the public.

[Recommend \(1\)](#)



guitarman61 wrote on 01/03/2010 10:23:50 AM:

There is a body of data that shows that thermal plants can and have operated cleanly and have emissions well below regulatory levels. And there are over 60 operating facilities in Japan. You can compost all you want but the key is to recycle what you can, compost what you can, and anything left over you can process through a thermal technology. There is no panacea but need a variety of processes. Fact of the matter is that the vast majority of our recyclables are sent overseas to facilities that may or may not have the same environmental controls that would be required in California.

[Recommend \(3\)](#)



pschramski wrote on 01/03/2010 10:10:05 AM:

Gasification is still just incinerators in disguise. What do we do with the waste after trash incineration? What toxic emissions (e.g., dioxin) are released in the process? The author fails to address these valid concerns. The reality is that failed examples of these projects litter the globe--just ask folks from the Sacramento region who took a trip last year to Japan. Communities in California, from Santa Cruz to Sacramento, have continued to reject these trash incinerators as unproven and unsafe. It doesn't solve our waste problem, our global warming problem, and creates more problems along the way. As for me, I plan to take another look at composting.

[Recommend \(6\)](#)