

## MARYLAND

### *New Heat Stress Law: Making Summer Safer*

In the face of mid-June's heat wave, counties and cities around the state announced earlier trash pickup times to keep workers safer in the face of extreme heat. This change was required thanks to Maryland's new heat stress standard, which requires employers to take protective action to reduce workers' risk of heat-related illnesses. This is a big win for workers and also for all of us learning to live with more extreme summer heat in the face of climate change.

This was not an easy win. In 2020, Maryland's General Assembly passed a law requiring the state government to create a heat stress standard. The original proposed standard fell short of actual rules that would protect Maryland workers from extreme heat. Over the last couple of years, we've worked together with legislators, labor, health, and environmental advocates to push for a stronger standard with a keen interest in protecting workers with the least power to advocate for themselves — especially food and farmworkers.



### *Baltimore Amends its Budget to Invest in Zero Waste!*

We're working to transition Baltimore City away from trash incineration, and that takes the City treating Zero Waste infrastructure like a serious investment. So, we were disappointed when the City's Fiscal Year 2026 budget was released in April and included no meaningful investments in Zero Waste. We were even more disappointed when we learned that the Department of Public Works had asked for money to launch yard waste composting in this year's budget — and the Mayor's administration had told them no.

We sprang into action with written comments, calls and emails, testimony at hearings, and ramping up the pressure to demand that the City invest in Zero Waste — and the City Council and Mayor listened! The City Council amended the budget in June to invest about a quarter of what DPW had requested for yard waste composting, allowing some preliminary work to begin this year before the full launch of the program next year. This is a victory, but it's not enough! We'll keep working for serious investment in Zero Waste infrastructure in Baltimore City.

Read our detailed comments on the budget with the South Baltimore Community Land Trust [here](#).

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# *W.R. Grace Moves Forward with Chemical Recycling Despite Community Opposition*

Despite loud community opposition, state and local governments in Howard County have approved permits for a pilot chemical recycling project to be located 230 feet from homes in the Cedar Creek neighborhood. Chemical recycling is a catchall term for processes that break down plastic into fuel or plastic feedstock. In this case, W.R. Grace's pilot project will create fuel from plastic feedstock.

The process is toxic and risky. At best, it produces more greenhouse gas emissions than creating new plastic, and there are additional dangers from plastic incineration, which can release a variety of toxic substances including volatile organic compounds, dioxins, heavy metals, and in some cases even PFAS. Beyond these health risks, chemical recycling facilities represent meaningful physical risks as well. Because these processes involve high heat and pressure, there's a very real risk of fires and explosions.

The Maryland Department of the Environment took some of the community's concerns into consideration in the final form of the air permit, but it still fell short. They are requiring some additional testing in the form of two one-time emission tests and sample testing of the plastic the facility will be incinerating for PFAS before it is used. However, ultimately MDE is trusting W.R. Grace's claims about the safety of their process and allowing risky toxic research near homes.

One thing the residents asked for was a buffer zone between the site and their homes. Buffer zones are considered a best practice for potentially dangerous processes — they reduce the safety hazard posed to neighbors and decrease conflict. This effort was unsuccessful.

The Cedar Creek neighborhood and its fight against having a new, toxic process next door is a clear example why zoning needs to be planned carefully and with an eye to the future. The land this neighborhood is built on was originally owned by W.R. Grace and was once a forested buffer separating the W.R. Grace campus from the next nearest neighborhood. The original zoning was commercial, not single family and attached homes. W.R. Grace and the developer petitioned the county to rezone the land for more dense, residential use, asserting that residential use would not be in conflict with the activities in their facility.

Unfortunately, research and development is a non-conforming, but allowed, use for this type of zoning. Because W.R. Grace has performed different types of research and development in the past, the county is allowing them to embark on new, riskier projects that require air permits for toxic releases.

There are ongoing appeals, and the fight goes on to help keep Columbia, MD safe and free from plastic burning.

### **Reducing Food Waste:** Composting continues to make moves!

In June, the Frederick City Council voted unanimously to make their pilot curbside compost program permanent. They join jurisdictions around the state that are using curbside pickup to make composting more accessible. Compostable materials collected from people's homes are brought to public and private facilities around the state to be composted. These are great steps, but the region still needs more composting and food waste reduction infrastructure to divert food waste out of our landfills and incinerators.





## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

# Bottle Bill on the Horizon

In May, The Anacostia Park and Community Collaborative (APACC), Clean Water Fund's partner in Washington DC, joined up with the Potomac River Keeper and the DC Department of Energy and the

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Environment, among others, for the 2025 Earth Day River Cleanup in Oxon Cove.

The Oxon Cove cleanup is an annual event that brings together volunteers from across DC and Northern Maryland to pick up litter from Oxon Run and Oxon Cove. Over the years, the effort has gotten thousands of pounds of plastic trash out of DC waterways before it ends up in the Potomac River. In 2025, more than 90 volunteers came together to celebrate the Earth and wade into the stream to collect hundreds of pounds of trash.

Cleanups like these are an essential tool to reduce the growing issues of urban runoff and the impact of trash on waterways. By capturing trash at the tributary level before it's carried downstream, local cleanup efforts can have an outsized impact on plastic pollution in larger bodies of water and ultimately our oceans.

Local cleanups are an important step in preventing harm from plastic pollution, but they are not a solution to the underlying problem. For that, we have

to move farther upstream to the policy level. This year Washington DC city council and the Maryland legislature each considered their own version of a bottle bill.

Bottle bills are laws designed to implement a system to provide a small container deposit for beverage containers. The deposit is refundable when containers are returned to participating locations. Bottle bills are extremely effective at reducing consumer plastic bottle waste. In the 10 states that have bottle bills they led to a [more than 60% reduction](#) in plastic bottle waste.

In Washington DC, the Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Amendment Act of 2025 is currently awaiting a public hearing. With the uncertainty at the federal budget level, this effort will be slow to move forward, but we are hopeful it will get a hearing this year. Read more about the DC Bottle Bill [here](#).

Because of the close proximity and shared waterways in the Chesapeake region, it's important that Maryland, DC, and Virginia all implement similar efforts to be most effective. This year in Maryland, a bottle bill under the name Maryland Beverage Container Recycling Refund and Litter Reduction Program was introduced and passed the House Environment and Transportation Committee,

but it stalled in the House Economic Matters Committee. While Virginia did not introduce a bottle bill in 2025, there have been versions introduced in the past, including one in [2022](#), and there are ongoing conversations around the legislature. [Efforts to move this key issue forward in Virginia continue.](#)

◀ APACC volunteers collect trash for the Oxon Cove cleanup in Washington DC.

PHOTO BY DOMINIQUE MCCOMB





# Burning Trash is No Longer Renewable Energy in Maryland!

After nearly a decade of campaigning with frontline communities to fight trash incinerators in Maryland, the General Assembly has finally deleted trash incineration from Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard. This ends Maryland's practice of greenwashing trash incineration and subsidizing incinerator companies millions of dollars per year, now redirecting that money toward renewable energy instead.

For many years, this campaign felt like we were running up against the same brick wall. Year after year, we rounded up our support from across the state and failed to secure the vote to get the bill out of committee. But we knew this was critically important to frontline communities living in the shadow of Maryland's incinerators in Baltimore City and Montgomery County, and to advocates who had fought successfully to prevent new incinerators in Frederick County and Baltimore City in the 2010s. So we persevered, and this eight-year campaign is finally at an end.

We are so thankful to the residents, allies, and frontline leaders who stood with us for the last decade as we kept alive the drumbeat to end these expensive subsidies for burning trash in Maryland's Renewable Portfolio Standard. We are also thankful to the Clean Water members and leadership who supported our staff through a very long and hard-fought campaign.

**Legislative Updates.** The fight to stop greenwashed subsidies for trash incinerators was only one of our legislative priorities this year. We fought for safer septic systems, environmental justice in the permitting process, and funding for composting — and we had to fight off a dangerous bid from industry groups to weaken Maryland's PFAS protections. Learn more about our wins, losses, and next steps [here](#).



Advocates speak at Lawyers Mall in Annapolis to rally support for ending subsidies for burning trash in Maryland's Renewable Energy Portfolio. PHOTO BY LIZZY UNGER

### *Drastic Budget Cuts Would Put Clean Water at Risk*

The Trump administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget proposal threatens to eliminate critical State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) under the Clean Water Act — putting public health, environmental protection, and local economies at serious risk. These grants fund essential state programs that monitor water quality, control pollution, issue permits, and support community-led restoration. Without this funding, many states report they would be forced to shut down core clean water operations, lay off staff, and abandon key projects that protect drinking water, prevent harmful algal blooms, and ensure safe rivers and lakes. Clean Water Action has urged Congress to reject this proposal and is partnering with fellow advocacy groups to educate lawmakers on its harmful consequences. Learn more about potential impacts of the White House budget proposal [here](#).

Clean Water Action has been monitoring the reconciliation Bill H.R. 1 (the “Big Beautiful Bill”), which would gut essential protections for our water and communities. This legislation slashes funding for coastal resilience, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) facilities, and environmental justice programs. These are vital investments that safeguard drinking water, protect vulnerable communities, and prepare for climate impacts. It strips away the regulatory tools needed to prevent pollution and hold polluters accountable. We need bold, equitable action to protect clean water, not rollbacks that put public health and our environment at risk.

### **Around Town: Source Water Collaborative Member Meeting**

Source Water Collaborative's Co-Chairs Lynn Thorp (Clean Water Action) and Deirdre White (Association of State Drinking Water Administrators) welcomed attendees to the annual Source Water Collaborative Member Meeting on June 17. This hybrid gathering brought together 31 national organizations to give updates, exchange ideas, and advance the shared goal of protecting America's drinking water at the source.

### **Toxic Chemicals:**

### *EPA Should Do More — Not Less — to Keep PFAS Chemicals Out of Our Water*

In April 2024, Clean Water Action applauded EPA for finalizing drinking water limits for six of the notorious per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) chemicals. PFAS are widely used chemicals that are highly persistent in the environment, have been found in drinking water sources nationwide, and are known to cause serious health problems. Yet this May, EPA announced plans that it would reconsider these Safe Drinking Water Act limits for four PFAS chemicals and delay protections for two more. Clean Water Action [released a statement](#) opposing weakening these health-based drinking water limits and urging EPA to accelerate Clean Water Act pollution limits and other initiatives that would keep PFAS out of our water and the environment in the first place.

These are examples of why we must urge our representatives not to cut EPA's budget or weaken our environmental and health safeguards.

[\*\*Take action today!\*\*](#)

### **Celebrating \$1 million in micro-donations!**



Clean Water Fund's long-running partnership with SurveyMonkey's Contribute program recently passed a major milestone: \$1 million donated to Clean Water Fund, and counting. One powerful demonstration of what we mean when we talk about “strength in numbers.”

You can help speed us on our way toward a second \$1 million. Just join the almost half-million others who have signed up to take surveys benefiting Clean Water Fund.

Learn more at  
[\*\*cleanwater.org/surveys\*\*](https://cleanwater.org/surveys)