

Date: Wed, 23 Sep 2009 11:05:58 -0400
To: lipton.conso@unilever.com
From: Mike Ewall <catalyst@actionpa.org>
Subject: Incineration is NOT green

Dear Lipton Representative,

I was glad to see your company's effort to be more environmentally responsible. However, your "zero-landfill" claim is particularly disturbing. According to the article below, your company is sending your non-recyclable, non-compostable waste to the trash incinerator in southeastern Virginia. Trash incineration is NOT renewable and does not constitute "waste-to-energy" (incinerators make a lot of toxic pollution, but very little energy -- far less than the energy embodied in the materials burned, which is why they should really be called "waste-OF-energy" facilities).

Trash incinerators are not "zero landfill" either, since they produce a highly toxic ash which ends up being landfilled. The ash is smaller in volume, but is more toxic and more leachable than the unburned trash, and thus does MORE damage to the environment when landfilled than if the full volume of unburned trash were landfilled directly.

You can find several reports on trash incineration here:
<http://www.energyjustice.net/incineration/>

I urge you to study this issue and come to the realization that your corporation should not be promoting trash incineration as renewable energy, but should continue to minimize your waste streams while sending your non-recyclable, non-compostable waste directly to a landfill, rather than having it burned first, increasing the toxic threats to the air and to the groundwater.

Sincerely,

Mike Ewall

Going for Zero: Lipton plant says 'No' to landfill waste

Published Wednesday, September 23, 2009

It was a two-year journey for the employees at the Lipton tea plant in Suffolk, but they finally did it. The plant achieved its goal this week of "zero-landfill," meaning that no waste from the plant — from manufacturing byproducts to employees' lunch remains — goes to the landfill.

"Our employees were very much involved in the process," Ted Narozny, plant manager at the West Washington Street facility, said Tuesday.

As Narozny talked, he passed by a box of tea bags on the assembly line with an empty tea bag lying on top of the filled ones — a fluke of the manufacturing process. He doubled back, grabbed the empty bag and dropped it into a bin marked "compost."

"We have these bins all throughout the plant," he said.

Narozny's first action — removing the empty bag — demonstrated commitment to product quality. But the second — not sending the bag to the landfill — demonstrated commitment to the environment.

Suffolk's Lipton plant is the only Lipton tea plant in the United States, and is the largest tea plant in the country. Its parent company, Unilever, has been a worldwide leader in promoting environmentally friendly initiatives at its brands, which include Caress, Dove, Country Crock, Klondike, Suave and Vaseline.

The zero-landfill goal was accomplished through the help of many outside agencies and the dedication of employees, Narozny said.

The Suffolk plant, which manufactures Lipton tea bags, pyramids, dry mix and to-go sticks, now recycles about 70 percent of its waste. About 22 percent gets composted at McGill Composting in Sussex, and the remaining eight percent is converted into renewable energy at the Southeastern Public Service Authority's waste-to-energy plant.

Employee-submitted ideas to achieve the goal were instituted as part of the plan, Narozny said. The plant has eliminated plastic strapping on pallets, replaced non-recyclable cleaning wipes with reusable rags, and begun using sturdier, reusable plastic pallets rather than traditional wooden ones.

Ramping up the recycling program was crucial to achieving the goal, Narozny said.

"We always had a good recycling program, but we wanted to get to a great recycling program," he said.

Bins for different types of recyclables were placed throughout the facility, along with examples of what can be recycled. The location also had a landfill audit done, in which Lipton employees followed their trash truck to the landfill, watched them dump the trash and then sifted through the trash to see what could have been recycled.

Bins for composting materials were placed throughout the facility, as well. Employees can dump their paper plates, apples cores and banana peels into the compost bins for disposal. Many manufacturing byproducts, including empty tea bags damaged in the manufacturing process, get sent to the composting facility.

Here, too, employees put forth great efforts to ensure the success of the program, Narozny said. A team of about 15 employees followed the compost material to the McGill site each Friday to sift through the waste, pick out items not suitable for composting, and report back to their fellow employees so those items would not return to the compost bin.

Any waste from the facility that cannot be recycled or composted — chip bags from lunch, for example — gets sent to the SPSA facility to be burned into energy, Narozny said.

"Our goal is to be green from the leaf to your cup," Narozny said.

Earlier this year, the Lipton brand announced a commitment to source all tea for its tea bags from Rainforest Alliance-certified farms by 2015. Farms certified by Rainforest Alliance use economically and environmentally sustainable practices, pay workers a decent wage and treat the community fairly, according to the alliance's Web site. The first Rainforest Alliance-certified farm was Kericho, Kenya, which is owned by Unilever.

For more information on the zero-landfill initiative, visit www.lipton.com.