Fighting New York’s Climate Emergency With Waste Zones:
New Law Would Make Huge Greenhouse Gas Reductions

(New York, NY, June 25, 2019) — Transitioning New York City to an efficient, high-diversion commercial waste zone (CWZ) system will avoid up to 2 million tons of Greenhouse Gas emissions per year, making this one of the most important climate initiatives City lawmakers will decide on this year.

The statistic is just one of several striking findings on greenhouse gas reduction in a new report issued today by the Transform Don't Trash NYC coalition, titled “Fighting New York’s Climate Emergency with Waste Zones.”

- An efficient, exclusive CWZ system can avoid 2 million tons of GHG emissions per year - equivalent to removing one in five cars from New York City streets. An exclusive system, with a single hauler per zone, and rigorous waste reductions targets for each zone would allow New York City to achieve these large cuts to GHG emissions from waste.

- Less than 25% of NYC’s commercial waste is recycled or composted now, far lower than in cities with exclusive waste zones like Seattle, San Jose, and San Francisco; Seattle achieved a 65% commercial recycling rate in 2017.

- Recycling and composting create far more jobs than landfilling, and a robust CWZ system can create hundreds of high-quality green jobs in the NYC area while also ensuring that edible food and other goods find their way to New Yorkers who will benefit from them.

- Compared to the current, grossly inefficient commercial waste system, a CWZ system will save 18 million diesel truck miles a year, or 37 trips to the moon and back.
The report comes as the City Council considers legislation to create an exclusive commercial waste zone system. The Commercial Waste Zone bill, Intro 1574, would enable haulers and customers to reduce and recycle far more waste cost-effectively.

The report cites the city’s Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the plan and estimates that this efficiency would save $23 million in annual operational costs, compared to an open-market “No Action” scenario -- enabling haulers to provide better waste diversion services while avoiding major increases in customer costs.

The City Council Sanitation Committee will hold a hearing on the Commercial Waste Zone bill on June 27th.

Council Member Reynoso said: “New York City has a long way to go towards reaching its sustainability and environmental goals. To start, we need to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, the private sanitation industry is a major contributor to our City’s emissions. A zoned collection system would make routes drastically more efficient, helping to cut down on vehicle miles traveled and pollutants. According to The Transform Don’t Trash Coalition’s recently released report, a commercial waste zone system would lead to a reduction of emissions equivalent to removing one in five cars off NYC Streets. I thank the Coalition for highlighting the radical environmental improvements that would be brought about by a CWZ system and look forward to implementing this system in NYC.”

Council Member Costa Constantinides, Chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection, said: "New York City must tackle greenhouse gas emissions from every sector to preserve its future. By creating commercial waste zones, we may be able to save as much as 2 million tons of greenhouse gases emitted annually, along with enhance our air quality and create a safer environment for our trash haulers. I am proud to support my colleague and friend, Sanitation Chair Antonio Reynoso, in moving this necessary legislation forward."

Report author Justin Wood from New York Lawyers for the Public Interest said: “There can be no more debate and half-measures on climate change. The time to transform New York’s commercial waste system to sharply reduce both greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution is now. A strong commercial waste zone system will avoid up to 2 million tons of CO2, eliminate 37 diesel truck trips to the moon and back each year, and finally give our small businesses access to sustainable, affordable waste services while creating hundreds of good green jobs for New Yorkers. We’re far behind other cities, where we should be leading. Passing Intro 1574 will restore New York as a national leader on climate justice and sustainability.”

Eric A. Goldstein, NYC Environment Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said: “The current system for commercial waste handling is an overlooked contributor to global warming. Roughly 1,100 diesel-powered trucks racing along city streets, spewing pollutants into the air and mixing food waste with trash headed for shipment to landfills where the organics are a major source of planet-cooking methane emissions. An exclusive zone system, as this report shows, can slash these airborne
emissions and transform the city’s commercial waste collection system from a renegade source of global warming pollution to a national model of sustainability and equity.

Tok Oyewole, Ph.D., Policy & Communications Organizer, NYC-EJA, said: "The climate and environmental impacts of excessive waste generation and poor waste separation - of sending what can be reused to landfill in diesel-polluting, carbon-consuming trucks - are very high, particularly in environmental justice and frontline communities. New York City’s commercial waste collection system did not originate with the health of people or the planet at the forefront, so we must follow the lead of other major cities and implement a more efficient exclusive zoned system to reduce vehicle miles travelled, while strongly prioritizing zero waste goals and just employment opportunities."

George Miranda, President of Teamsters Joint Council 16 said: "New York City is not going to meet our climate change goals if we don’t tackle the sanitation system. We passed congestion pricing and we passed building emissions cuts. An exclusive commercial waste zone system is the next logical step in our just transition to a low-emission and fair economy for all workers."

Maritza Silva-Farrell, Executive Director of ALIGN said: "New York City’s private commercial waste system is broken. It has a lot of problems, from environmental injustice to unsafe, low-pay jobs. Intro 1574 will ensure good jobs for workers and a safer environment for all New Yorkers. By assigning a single hauler to each zone, this plan will move our city forward on meeting our climate commitments with a just transition to a low emission economy where workers, neighborhoods, and low-income communities of color matter. We need to make this legislation a reality, so that our city can have a commercial sanitation system that we can be proud of, from collection to disposal."

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Notes to editors


The Transform Don’t Trash NYC coalition is dedicated to transforming New York City’s commercial trash industry to reduce waste and pollution, foster clean and healthy communities for all New Yorkers, and create good jobs. Members include the New York City Environmental Justice, ALIGN, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Joint Council 16 & Locals 813, 831 (the Uniformed Sanitationmen’s Association), 125, 210, 445, 456, 553, and 812, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.