

CONNECT THE DOTS: Money in Politics

Mandatory Garbage Grinder Installation: Taxpayer Dollars Down the Drain?

Fact sheet 3 in the Common Cause/NY series on the ENVIRONMENT.



New York City produces approximately 47,000 tons of solid waste each day, between residential, commercial and construction debris. With no waste disposal facilities within the city borders, all of New York City's waste must be shipped out to other parts of New York or other states. The NYC Council is considering Intro 100 (formerly 381), which would mandate that all new residential kitchens be constructed with at least one garbage grinder and Intro 220 (formerly 407), which would allow commercial food businesses to install garbage grinders, also known as food waste disposals (FWDs). Proponents say these proposals will reduce solid waste and save the city money, but opponents such as the NYC Department of Environmental Protection and environmental groups counter that the idea would raise water rates for taxpayers, cause sewage problems and send good sense down the drain.



One Man's Trash is Another Man's Treasure

Most New Yorkers probably don't think much of the food waste they throw away, but to a few plumbing and restaurant interests, that trash is a goldmine. Plumbing companies and companies that produce plumbing parts would see a steady income from the mandated installation of garbage grinders, and plumbers themselves would have a steady flow of work.

Since bills to mandate the installation of garbage grinders in all new residential units and to allow the installation of garbage grinders in commercial food businesses were first introduced early in 2003, the food and plumbing industries as well as a number of trade unions have spent over \$500,000 lobbying the New York City Council, The NYC Department of Sanitation, and the Department of Environmental Protection.

Lobby \$ Spent by the Plumbing & Food Interests in NYC

Total Reported Spent in 2003 and 2004 = \$522,076

In-Sink-Erator—The largest plumbing supply company in the nation, **In-Sink-Erator** spent **\$90,932 in 2003** to hire **Geto & DeMilly, Inc.** to lobby in support of Intros 100 and 220. The company has renewed its \$90,000 per year contract with Geto & DeMilly to continue lobby efforts in in 2004.

Plumbing Foundation City of New York, Inc.— **In 2003, Plumbing Foundation City of New York** spent a total of **\$54,697 on lobbying** in support of food waste disposal installations and on other issues. **This included \$30,697 to hire Geto & DeMilly, Inc.** and **\$24,000 to hire Stewart O'Brien to lobby on its behalf.** They have renewed both contracts for 2004.

United Food and Commercial Workers— A large nationwide union, the **UFCW** spent **\$75,000 in 2003** lobbying in support of Intro 220 and on other issues.

Neighborhood Retail Alliance—A coalition of small restaurant businesses in New York City, the Neighborhood Retail Alliance paid **Richard Lipsky Associates \$102,000 in 2003** to lobby in favor of Intro 407 and other "restaurant interests." They have renewed the contract for 2004.

Food Industry Alliance— In 2003, the Food Industry Alliance paid **\$20,467** for lobbying in support of Intro 220 and on other issues.

Red Apple Group—A group of chain food stores, the Red Apple Group has **contracted Richard Lipsky Associates** to lobby in support of food waste disposers and on other issues **in both 2003 and 2004 for \$72,000 per year.**

Restaurant Association (NYS) *— In 2003, the Restaurant Association of New York State spent **\$92,275 on lobbying** regarding garbage disposals and Intro 407, among many issues. Since the beginning of 2004, RANYS has spent another **\$14,805** lobbying on these issues, bringing its total spending to **\$106,980 to date.**

**All figures based on lobbyist filings with the New York City Clerk's Office. No city filing available for Restaurant Association, so state filing with NYS Temporary Lobbying Commission was used.*

\$\$ Campaign Cash Runs Through the Pipes \$\$

TOTAL = \$223,050

Plumbers Union Local 1 and its employees have contributed a total of \$218,050 to city level campaigns since the 2001 election cycle. In addition, Plumbing Contractors has spent \$5,000 on city level campaigns since the 2001 election cycle, for total campaign cash of \$223,050 from plumbing interests since 2001.

\$42,375 of these contributions were given to sponsors of Intros 100 and 220.

Want to learn more about how money in politics impacts the **environment** in NY? Check out our fact sheets on power plants and on the Indian Point nuclear power facility

Would NYC Benefit From Mandated Garbage Grinder Installation?

According to the Department of Environmental Protection, if 1/3 of all NYC households installed and used food waste disposals, the city would save approximately \$12.9 million a year. With current garbage hauling rates hovering around \$70/ton, any reduction of the amount of money the city spends to have its garbage shipped outside the city borders is appealing.

But the Department of Environmental Protection also argues that garbage grinders are costly in other ways. The agency estimates that if 1/3 of all households were using garbage grinders, the additional cost of treating that residential food waste would be in the range of \$30 to \$40 million every year in expense costs and \$300 million or more in capital costs for the needed wastewater treatment facility upgrades.

Environmental experts say that the need to run water while using grinders would increase water demand in the city. A 1997 study by the Department of Environmental Protection estimated that use of food waste disposals would increase the demand for water in New York City by nearly 8 million gallons a day, when the city is already straining the water supply by using approximately 100 million gallons of water more per day than the water supply can healthily support.

They also argue that the nitrogen content of food waste, already a key contributing factor to the poor water quality in the western Long Island Sound and Jamaica Bay, would only further degrade our water supply. The Department of Environmental Protection has been ordered by New York State and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to put in place a program of sewage treatment plant modifications to reduce the amount of nitrogen that discharges from these plants and into the East River and Jamaica Bay. The agency's ten year plan calls for spending \$400 million for reducing nitrogen *if* the city is able to reduce its daily nitrogen discharge. If the nitrogen discharge actually increases because of food waste, the agency says it will be forced to spend much more.



During wet-weather periods, environmental experts say that the additional water waste would also end up in the combined sewer overflows that run off into the water supply without being treated. When it rains, storm water runoff combines with raw sewage. When this water combination exceeds the capacity of the sewage treatment plant, the wastewater is bypassed directly into the nearest waterway, untreated. With greater amounts of food waste water in the sewer system, the potential for untreated combined sewage overflow to end up in the New York water supply increases as well.

These projections do not include the additional costs that would result from allowing commercial food businesses to install garbage grinders as well.

Muddying the Water

While the benefits of garbage grinders for average New Yorkers are a subject of sharp debate, the benefits for some businesses and labor groups are clear.

Rather than pay to have their garbage hauled, **commercial food businesses** would save significant amounts of money if they could grind all of their food waste. The increased cost of water treatment maintenance would be borne out by the 830,000 property owners who pay water and sewer bills.

FWDs can only be installed by licensed professions. Thus, the cost of installing a \$150 garbage grinder would cost almost \$2,000— a boon for **the plumbing industry**. With a projected installation rate of 1% of residences and commercial food businesses, plumbing supply companies and as well as professional plumbers would significantly profit from the passage of this legislation.

Clogging Up the Democratic Process

What New Yorkers need is serious debate on the merits of these proposals. The New York City Council must weigh the arguments for each side carefully, without allowing heavy lobby spending to influence its decisions.

