May 18, 2007

Senator Jeff Bingaman
703 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Bingaman,

On behalf of the Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA), I am writing to request that you include waste-to-energy as a renewable energy resource in your renewable portfolio standard to be considered by the Senate. SWANA is a not-for-profit professional association with over 7,500 members from both the public and private sectors of the solid waste industry. Our mission is to advance the practice of environmentally and economically sound management of municipal solid waste (MSW) in North America. We believe that energy produced by the combustion of municipal solid waste, known as waste-to-energy, is a valuable part of any renewable energy program and has the potential to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) that contribute to global warming and climate change.

Renewable energy policies currently being debated in Congress must support waste-to-energy if those policies are to be successful in promoting fuel diversity, as well as reducing dependence on fossil fuels and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The nation’s 88 waste-to-energy facilities safely manage approximately 95,000 tons of household solid waste per day and have an electric capacity of 2,700 megawatts. By combusting solid waste that would have otherwise been landfilled, these facilities generate clean, renewable electricity which offsets fossil-fuel fired electric generation.

I understand that you have drafted a national renewable portfolio standard that currently does not include waste-to-energy as a renewable energy resource. This omission only serves to discourage an abundant domestic energy source. Exclusion of waste-to-energy will put waste-to-energy, and the communities that own or rely upon those facilities, at a disadvantage if waste-to-energy is not treated the same as other renewable resources.

Waste-to-energy meets the two basic criteria for establishing what a renewable energy resource is—its fuel source (municipal solid waste) is sustainable and indigenous. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that over 80 percent of municipal solid waste is organic biomass derived from sustainable, renewable resources including paper, wood and vegetation. Waste-to-energy facilities recover valuable energy from this biomass after efforts to “reduce, reuse, and recycle”
have been implemented by households and local governments. Every household and business in every city and town in America generates municipal solid waste that could be converted to renewable energy in a waste-to-energy facility. A renewable portfolio standard that excludes waste-to-energy would discourage homegrown renewable energy generation and reverse nearly 30 years of federal laws that recognize waste-to-energy as renewable. In addition, it is inconsistent with state laws in nearly half the states with renewable portfolio standards that recognize waste-to-energy as renewable.

Please refer to the attached position paper, which provides further evidence to support waste-to-energy’s identification as a renewable resource.

Recognizing that the combustion of municipal solid waste produces clean, renewable energy is an important component of America’s renewable policy. Including waste-to-energy in your renewable portfolio standard will protect communities that rely on this important technology. I hope you will reconsider your exclusion of waste-to-energy in your renewable portfolio standard, and please do not hesitate to contact SWANA if we can provide any further pertinent data or research.

Sincerely,

John H. Skinner, Ph.D.
Executive Director and CEO
SWANA