

The Facts about Waste-to-Energy Facilities

What is “waste to energy?”

Waste-to-energy facilities produce clean, renewable energy through the combustion of municipal solid waste. This process occurs in specifically designed power plants equipped with the most modern pollution control equipment to clean emissions.

How many waste-to-energy facilities are currently operating in the United States?

There are 89 waste-to-energy plants operating in 27 states. These facilities manage about 13 percent of America’s trash, or about 95,000 tons each day. Waste-to-energy facilities generate about 2,500 megawatts of electricity to meet the power needs of nearly 2.3 million homes, and the facilities serve the trash disposal needs of more than 36 million people.

What waste-to-energy facilities are currently operating in the Tampa Bay area?

The Pasco County Solid Waste Resources Recovery Facility began operation in May 1991. The facility processes up to 1,050 tons per day of solid waste, generating up to 31.2 megawatts of renewable energy. This energy is sold to Progress Energy. Last year, this facility generated enough electricity to conservatively power 15,000 homes and earned \$15 million in revenue for the county. The facility is owned by Pasco County and operated by Covanta Energy. It sits on 72 acres in the Shady Hills area of central Pasco County.

The Hillsborough County Resource Recovery Facility began operation in October 1987. The facility processes 1,200 tons per day of solid waste, generating up to 29 megawatts of renewable energy. This energy is sold to Tampa Electric Company. The facility is owned by Hillsborough County and operated by Covanta Energy. It sits on 40 acres in Tampa.

The Pinellas County Resource Recovery Facility began operating in 1983 and is the largest in the United States. This facility has the capacity to process 3,150 tons of garbage every day. It sells about 60 megawatts of renewable energy to Progress Energy, which powers approximately 45,000 homes and businesses daily. The remaining energy is used to power the plant itself.

Are waste-to-energy facilities safe for the environment?

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, waste-to-energy facilities produce electricity with “less environmental impact than almost any other source of electricity.”

America’s waste-to-energy facilities today meet some of the most stringent environmental standards in the world and employ the most advanced emissions control equipment available.

Is the existing Pasco County waste-to-energy facility a significant source of air emissions, such as greenhouse gases?

NO. Pasco County’s current facility not only meets Florida DEP’s current air emissions standards, but it out performs the standards in virtually every category (see attached bar graphs.) For example:

	Florida DEP Permitted Level tons/year	Pasco County’s Actual Annual Emissions for 2006 tons/year	% of Permitted Level
Mercury	0.2667	0.0233	8.47%
Dioxin	0.000114	0.0000062	5.43%
Carbon Monoxide	443.61	18.163	4.09%
Volatile Organic Compounds	38.64	1.14546	2.96%

Is the ash from waste-to-energy plants safe?

Yes. Ash residue from waste-to-energy facilities is tested in accordance with strict state and federal leaching tests. It is consistently shown to be safe for land disposal and reuse. Ash also exhibits concrete-like properties causing it to harden once it is placed and compacted in a landfill This reduces the potential for rainwater to leach contaminants from ash landfills into the ground.

Does Pasco County already have a plan to expand their existing waste-to-energy facility?

YES. According to Pasco County’s Comprehensive Plan – 2025 (revised Dec. 5, 2006), the following goal and policy have been determined for the issue of solid waste:

GOAL 4: Dispose of Pasco County’s solid waste in an economically efficient and environmentally sound manner.

Policy SWT 4.2.1 Expansion of Resource Recovery Plant

Pasco County shall plan for expansion of the resource recovery plant when the disposal volume reaches 80 percent of daily capacity.

-- Chapter 10: Public Facilities Element (Solid Waste) 10-25
<http://www.pascocountyfl.net/devser/gm/complan06/c10.pdf>

To accommodate this policy, the current Resource Recovery Plant (the Waste-to-Energy facility in Shady Hills) was specifically designed for future expansion.

*Sources: Integrated Waste Services Association
Covanta Energy
Pasco County Comprehensive Plan – 2025*

This information is brought to you by the Protectors of Florida’s Legacy.