

Waste-to-Energy Electric-Generating Capacity: U.S. Energy Information Administration Report Addresses 1980-2027 Timeframes



Walter Wright, Jr.
wwright@mwlaw.com
(501) 688.8839

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The United States Energy Information Administration (“EIA”) issued an August 30th report titled:

U.S. Capacity to Convert Waste to Energy Declines After Remaining Steady Since 1994 (“Report”)

The *Report* addresses both historical waste-to-energy (“WTE”) electric-generating capacity and outlines projections for the next several years.

WTE plants typically refer to facilities that burn municipal solid waste to produce steam in a boiler to generate electricity. Municipal solid waste can include various energy-rich material such as paper, plastics, yard waste, and products derived from wood.

Combustion technologies might include:

- Mass burn facilities
- Modular systems
- Refuse-derived fuel systems

The August 30th EIA *Report* states that WTE electric-generating capacity has:

... recently started to decline after averaging around 2,219 megawatts (MW) for 24 years, according to our June 2022 Preliminary Monthly Electric Generator Inventory.

For the time period 2018 to 2022, 188 MW of WTE capacity is stated to have been retired. Further, the *Report* projects another 36 MW is expected to retire by 2027. The reason given for the decrease includes:

- Low electricity prices
- Local opposition
- Continued policy concerns about emissions

WTE plants constitute a small portion of United States electric generating capacity. In addition, they are stated to be principally concentrated in the Northeast and Florida. In fact, Florida has the most generating capacity at 540 MW. New York and Pennsylvania are ranked second and third, respectively.

To the best of my knowledge, there is not a WTE plant in the State of Arkansas.

One of the traditional arguments in favor of WTE plants is their ability to divert solid waste from landfills. The *Report* notes that about 90% of WTE capacity was added between 1980 and 1995. This is noted to be

a time period when landfilling municipal solid waste was relatively expensive. Nevertheless, the *Report* states that emission concerns arose in the mid-1990s, resulting in most existing facilities having to install air pollution control systems or be terminated.

A copy of the *Report* can be downloaded [here](#).