



US/Canada

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Our region typically doesn't engage directly with municipalities and cities, but rather engages and supports our members who work on various zero waste campaigns and policy initiatives through engagement with their local municipalities and other key stakeholders. Zero waste cities are hard to define in the context of the U.S, and as a result, we don't have a complete definition of a "Zero Waste City".

Our approach with cities

GAIA's U.S./Canada regional zero waste work has adapted to an ever-changing policy and advocacy landscape. With the successful closure of the last two incinerators in the State of California (SERRF & Covanta Stanislaus) in 2024, our focus has shifted to working with communities on what life looks like after incineration, with an emphasis on zero waste strategies. In addition, our work on food waste and organics has increased substantially, as methane in the waste sector became a growing priority for our region and other international stakeholders throughout the year. Ensuring that environmental justice is at the forefront of the evolving methane reduction movement was critical for this work. In 2025, we expect to continue prioritising work at the state and local levels and providing additional opportunities for environmental justice groups to engage in various zero waste strategies through both advocacy and policy.

In 2024, our biggest priorities involved developing our new regional methane and organics strategy and supporting communities, whose advocacy has led to an incinerator shutdown, with their transition to zero waste. Our methane and organics strategy has evolved into a priority due to the increased focus on methane emissions

reductions at the local, state, national, and international levels. In addition, we're in a critical time in the United States as more incinerators are closing due to sheer costs and lack of consistent revenue. This has made zero waste more possible than ever in the region, but it's critical to find and stop new "false solutions" from filling the gaps left behind from closing incinerators.

Best practice examples/wins from 2024

California

The last two remaining incinerators (SERRF & Covanta Stanislaus) in the state of California have officially shut down due to strong grassroots advocacy spearheaded by GAIA member groups such as East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice, Californians Against Waste (CAW), and Valley Improvement Projects (VIP). The successful shutdown of these two incinerators was a direct result of multiple campaign strategies meant to strip away the subsidies the incineration industry relies on to operate facilities.

While working to "defund" incineration, these groups and allies also advocated for decentralised zero waste strategies to address the ever-growing waste problem in the state. More specifically, these groups are advocating for the proper implementation of California's organics

recycling law (SB 1383), along with improving landfill regulations and monitoring requirements and investment in zero waste infrastructure.

Minneapolis, MN

After years of strong advocacy from GAIA member groups CURE and the Minnesota Environmental Justice Table (MNEJT), the Minneapolis City Council unanimously voted to shut down the HERC incinerator located in Downtown Minneapolis. Although there is still a battle with the County on an official closing date, all signs point to a closure date in 2028. GAIA members are now working with city officials on a new zero waste plan with an emphasis on environmental justice and a just transition. In addition to the plan, CURE and MNEJT are advocating for a strong organics recycling bill at the state level, along with stronger landfill regulations and monitoring requirements.

Priorities for 2025

2025 will see our zero waste programme continue prioritising our ever-evolving methane and organics work. More specifically, we just launched our U.S. Methane Reduction and Environmental Justice Regrant Programme, where we are funding 12 organisations across 9 projects to work on campaigns/projects around reducing methane emissions from the waste sector. These projects cover everything from investments in food waste/organics infrastructure to food donation, advocating for food waste prevention measures, and much more. In addition, we are prioritising changing the narrative in the U.S. around methane emissions being a "landfill issue", which provides a perverse incentive for incineration. Along with fighting this narrative, we will also be working to align our movement and others to ensure environmental justice is at the forefront of this ever-evolving methane space.



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