

November 23, 2021

Governor Kathy Hochul
Executive Chamber
State Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Re: Veto Assembly Bill A2591A promoting “Low Embodied Carbon Concrete”

Dear Governor Hochul,

The cement industry has a climate change problem but supporting “low embodied carbon concrete” is not going to solve it. Cement plants emit 7% of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions and rather than taking steps to reduce those emissions, the cement industry is promoting false solutions, such as the adoption of Assembly Bill A2591A, which we urge you to veto.

Thank you for your leadership on climate change issues in New York. We share your commitment to reducing greenhouse gas pollution and our respective organizations are working every day to address the climate crisis. If we thought this bill was an effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we would support it. But, it’s not, therefore, we urge you to veto it.

New York has two cement plants, the Lafarge cement plant in Ravena which is located across the street from a large public school and very close to the Hudson River. And Lehigh Cement which is located in Glens Falls.

Although Assembly Bill A2591A is masquerading as a climate change mitigation policy, signing this bill may actually hasten the climate crisis.

This bill promotes “Low Embodied Carbon Concrete” which is akin to the myth of “Clean Coal.” Although the bill does not define “Low Embodied Carbon Concrete,” we know that the cement industry is actively promoting two ways to reduce its carbon emissions.

First, the cement industry burns waste as a substitute for coal, calling the waste an “alternative fuel.” A recent special report by Reuters titled “[Trash and Burn, Big Brands Stoke Cement Kilns with Plastic Waste as Recycling Falter](#)” published on October 28, 2021, provides new details on how consumer goods companies are funding projects to send plastics to be burned at cement kilns as a form of cheap energy. The Reuters article identified nine corporate collaborations launched over the last two years between consumer goods companies and cement makers to burn plastic packaging. Burning plastics releases harmful pollutants such as dioxins and furans. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, “there is no significant climate benefit to be gained from substituting plastic for coal, and that burning this waste in cement kilns can create harmful air pollution that must be monitored.”

Lafarge has attempted to burn solid waste in the past. Most recently, we were grateful to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation for denying Lafarge’s request to burn 1 million discarded tires each year right across from a school.

Second, the cement industry is promoting carbon capture and sequestration. This is an expensive and unproven technology that perpetuates the burning of fossil fuels. Furthermore, despite investing massive amounts of public funding to try to make it work, it has so far failed.

This bill requires the establishment of an industry-dominated advisory committee to assist the Office of General Services with developing standards for the undefined “Low Embodied Carbon Concrete.” The Office of General Services (OGS) would be required to consider bid incentives. Remarkably, OGS is required to expedite product evaluation protocols for these products. It is not clear why this needs to be expedited and, in general, rushing a product evaluation process does not seem like a responsible policy.

The cement industry is the source of 7% of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions. Burning plastics and other waste, and relying on carbon capture is not going to solve this problem.

We urge you to please veto this bill and do the following:

- Direct the OGS and the Department of Environmental Conservation to promote the use of ground glass pozzolans as low carbon substitutes in concrete. This will also improve the market for recycled glass in our state.
- Urge Lafarge and Lehigh to improve the efficiency of their operations, thereby reducing the burning of coal (and greenhouse gas emissions) in our state.
- Ban the burning of plastics in cement kilns.
- Direct the Department of Environmental Conservation to strictly enforce the existing single-use plastic bag ban and the forthcoming polystyrene ban which will take effect on January 1, 2022. Reducing the use of plastic rather than burning it at cement kilns is a much better policy to both protect our health and also slow climate change.
- Install air monitors at the Ravena Coeymans Selkirk School, across the street from the Lafarge plant.
- Direct the Department of Environmental Conservation to do more air monitoring at the Lafarge and Lehigh plants to protect the health of not only the affected communities but also the workers at these plants.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and suggestions

Sincerely,

Judith Enck, President, Beyond Plastics

Laura Bierman, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of NYS Albany, NY

John Hocevar, Oceans Campaign Director, Greenpeace USA, Washington, DC

Jonathan Westin, Executive Director, New York Communities for Change, New York, NY

Eric Weltman, Senior Organizer, Food & Water Watch, Brooklyn, NY

Blair Horner, Executive Director, NY Public Interest Research Group, Albany, NY

Jen Fela, VP, Programs & Communications, Plastic Pollution Coalition, Washington, DC

Matt Gove, Mid-Atlantic Policy Manager, Surfrider Foundation, Brooklyn, NY

Denise Patel, U.S. & Canada Regional Director, GAIA, New York, NY

Paul Connett, Director of the American Environmental Health Studies Project, Work on Waste USA, Binghamton, NY

Brien Weiner, President, South Shore Audubon Society, Freeport, NY

Teresa Kotturan, Sisters of Charity Federation, New York, NY

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Katherine Bini, Board Member, Metro N.Y. Catholic Climate Movement, New York, NY

Dorothy Reilly, Co-Founder, Carbon CREW Project, Water Mill, NY

Catherine Cavanaugh, Steering Committee member, Women Against War, Albany, NY

Chester Opalka, President, Opalka Family Investments, Averill Park, NY

Guy Jacob, Conservation Chair, Nassau Hiking & Outdoor Club, Elmont, NY

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Patti Wood, Executive Director, Grassroots Environmental Education, Port Washington, NY

Ellen Neumaier, President, Aurorans for Climate and Environmental Sense, East Aurora, NY

Emily Puthoff, Director, Hudson Valley Bee Habitat, Kingston, NY

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Ginger Storey-Welch, local leader, North Country 350 Alliance, Colton, NY

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Diana Wright, Secretary-Treasurer, PAUSE - People of Albany United for Safe Energy, Albany, NY

Steve Pierce, Executive Director, Media Alliance Inc., Troy, NY

Patti Wood, Executive Director, Grassroots Environmental Education, Port Washington, NY

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Matthew Miller, President, Ravena-Coeymans-Selkirk Teachers Association, Ravena, NY

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Memo Salazar, Co-Chair, Western Queens Community Land Trust, New York, NY

Elizabeth Broad, Campaign Director, New Yorkers for Clean Power, Kingston, NY