

***New Jersey  
State Commission of Investigation***



**March 22, 2017  
Immediate Release**

**Contact: Kathy Riley, SCI  
609-292-6767**

***SCI REPORT***

**CORRUPT RECYCLING  
OF TAINTED DIRT AND DEBRIS**

TRENTON – Elements of New Jersey’s recycling industry remain vulnerable to corruption and intrusion by criminal elements because of glaring loopholes in the State’s solid-waste regulatory and oversight system, the State Commission of Investigation said in a report issued today.

The SCI report, culminating extensive investigative work that included a public hearing last spring, found that unscrupulous operators profit by covertly dumping contaminated soil and construction debris at inappropriate and unregulated sites that now pose serious environmental and public-health threats.

“Masquerading as seemingly legitimate recyclers, they are able to evade any form of background vetting and licensure simply because no such requirements exist for those engaged in the business they purportedly conduct,” the report states.

According to sworn testimony and documentary evidence obtained by the Commission, the participants in this toxic trafficking included organized crime associates and convicted felons.

The investigation revealed that bulk amounts of tainted material, including debris laced with known cancer-causing agents – much of it from out-of-state – wound up in New Jersey locations subject to run-off into creeks and other waterways and quite possibly was passed off as properly recycled topsoil.

“Aside from the obvious environmental concerns arising from this activity,” the report states, “efforts to contain and/or remove this polluted material are fraught with difficult technical and logistical challenges and carry substantial cost implications for taxpayers. Moreover, these flagrant and continuing abuses have tarnished and undercut the economic viability of legitimate elements of the industry.”

Legislation introduced during the investigation would address a wide spectrum of systemic deficiencies identified by the Commission. Among other things, the bill (S-2306) would take the major step of subjecting individuals in the recycling industry to the same licensing and oversight requirements under the law as it applies to solid waste. Pending action on this broader reform measure, the SCI called for immediate enactment of some form of background check as a condition of entering the recycling industry –

most urgently in the area of “Class B” recyclables, which includes construction/demolition dirt and debris.

“This sector is too similar and too closely connected to the solid waste industry to have been left unchecked for so long,” the Commission said. “Without at least this change in the statutory framework, criminal elements will continue to profit from polluting at will.”



*The State Commission of Investigation is an independent New Jersey watchdog agency established in 1968 to investigate organized crime and corruption, waste of tax money and other abuses of the public trust. Copies of public reports are available at the Commission’s offices or via its Web site at [www.state.nj.us/sci](http://www.state.nj.us/sci).*