



Opening Statement

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New Jersey State Commission of Investigation
Public Hearing
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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome.

Not so long ago, back in the 1970s and 80s, New Jersey spent a lot of time and taxpayer money addressing its persistent reputation as a dumping ground. Many remember the stark images of hypodermic needles and medical debris washing up on our beaches. The industrial waste discharged near our rivers and streams and in our forests. The fires and explosions. The poisoned drinking water. And the fact that more Superfund sites were identified here than in any other state in the nation.

This sorry history spawned serious public health issues and major environmental damage. It also exposed significant gaps in our regulatory and statutory framework. With clean-ups ordered, penalties imposed and tougher state and federal environmental regulations put in place, it was easy to believe that the dumping-ground days were over.

But they are not. Not by a long shot.

Today, you will learn how elements of New Jersey's recycling industry have been transformed into a lucrative underground economy that profits from the indiscriminate dumping of tons upon tons of contaminated soil and construction debris. You will hear how enormous amounts of tainted material have been trucked from out-of-state and left

to foul the water's edge along Raritan Bay. You will hear how a small recycling center in South Jersey became a sprawling landfill occupied by acres of construction debris strewn within shouting distance of the Delaware River. And you will hear about the costs – both economic and environmental – of reclaiming and cleaning up these haphazard dumping grounds.

It should surprise no one that the architects of this toxic trafficking include organized crime associates and convicted criminals. In one form or another, profiting from society's refuse has always been part of the mob's twisted business model, as the SCI itself has amply demonstrated by repeated investigations. Just five years ago, the Commission revealed continued organized crime intrusion in the solid waste industry and offered a series of reform recommendations designed to crack down yet again on unscrupulous trash haulers.

During this hearing, we will show why strong government oversight should encompass elements of the recycling industry as well. We will introduce you to the primary purveyors of this scourge – rogue “dirt brokers” whose criminal ties have remained secret because they are subject to no licensing requirements, not even simple background checks. We will show how they have been able to recruit truckers to haul contaminated soil and debris and unload it virtually anywhere they want to get the best bang for their tainted buck.

And because the industry is so loosely regulated, this activity doesn't just pose a threat to the immediate dump sites or impact only those who live nearby. It is a reckless menace where the damage can include everything from polluted run-off to creeks and

streams to toxic dirt passed off as properly recycled topsoil – perhaps destined for gardens and flower beds in neighborhoods across this State.

Today’s hearing is part of a comprehensive statewide investigation that is not yet complete. But there is an urgency to this matter that demands public and official attention now, and that is why we are here. Throughout their efforts to develop the facts in this case, our investigators have been working diligently with state and local environmental and other authorities to alert them to our findings so that emergent remedial actions could be taken as warranted. We will continue to seek that cooperation as we move forward.

Please call the first witness.