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Recovery: Post-Storm Cleanup and the Effects on the City's Health and Infrastructure
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Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, Committee on Environmental Protection, Committee on Parks and Recreation, and the Committee on Health

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Good afternoon Chairperson Arroyo and chairs of the Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, Committee on Environmental Protection, the Committee on Parks and Recreation and the Committee on Health. My name is Lily Kelly, and I am Interim Director for Global Green USA's New York Office and its Coalition for Resource Recovery. Global Green USA coordinates a variety of projects across the country focused on urban sustainability, but today I am here to talk about waste diversion, and how it relates to post-storm recovery and the city's infrastructure.

We'd like to commend the City and Federal agencies that kept our City running following Sandy, and managed the tremendous influx of waste that inevitably follows these events. As an environmental non-profit and committed participant in the recovery of New York City's discarded materials, Global Green would also like to offer our assistance with any efforts to plan for more effective waste recovery after future weather events of two key waste streams: construction & demolition (C&D) waste, and yard waste.

Recovering more of the surges in C&D debris created by storms requires advance planning for efficient use and expansion of local sorting and processing infrastructure. Thankfully, technologies exist that can rapidly and effectively remove valuable materials from the jumbled C&D waste from storm-damaged houses. Locations and options for temporary sorting facilities and technologies for emergency situations can be identified by the relevant city agencies well in advance so that a strategy can be implemented smoothly and rapidly in the wake of a natural disaster, without placing undue strain on our local infrastructure. Additional planning for increased deployment of sorting equipment for short-term surges in this material can go far toward ensuring that the maximum amount of metal and clean wood is kept out of landfills, saving space as well as preventing greenhouse gas emissions.

As we've all seen, when storms like Sandy hit, neighborhoods are faced with overwhelming amounts of yard waste generated over a very short period of time. According to NYC Parks and Recreation, Sandy took down over 20,000 trees – many times more than were destroyed by Tropical Storm Irene. We recognize the need to manage this waste in a timely manner for public health and safety reasons and to prevent combustion risks from stockpiling, and we would like to support efforts to have this material also processed into useful products as part of future recovery efforts.

Ideally, New York City waste generators would have access to local markets that can accept organic material created from the 4,000 tons of food waste generated every day, and these markets could also be flexible enough to absorb surges in supply of yard waste in the wake of storm events. This would allow our winter storm debris to be turned into mulch and soil for spring landscapes, gardens, and roadways. Recovering wood debris requires a strong chain of both infrastructure and expertise starting with infrastructure to chip the wood, links between supply of wood chips with users such as construction contractors, or space to store the wood safely until they are needed, and

finally local end-markets that keep shipping costs down. Having all of these factors work together can ensure that a significant portion of the organic matter from New York City stays in New York City.

There are several examples of outlets for yard waste that could potentially be expanded. Wood chips are also frequently used on construction sites to prevent soil compaction, and yard waste collected after storm events could offset material that is currently brought in from out of state for that purpose. Another major outlet for recovering more of this organic material could be in-city Department of Transportation landscapes. According to staff at Arterial Roadway Repair and Maintenance, much of the 1700 acres of in-city DOT land could benefit from absorbing large amounts of compost as a means of improving the long-term health of the landscapes.[1]

Global Green will be hosting a regional convergence this fall on markets for products from organic waste including fertilizer and compost. This follows our event this past November which featured participation by the State-level environmental agencies from New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. We look forward to working with you and others in the region to build sufficient market demand for the organic wastes generated every day, as well as for after storms, when we need it most.

[1] Roughly half of NYC DOT's 1716 acres of landscapes is lawns and half is woodlands. For woodlands, 2'' of compost, and for lawns 1'' of compost, could be applied annually. Using estimates from Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, we assumed that each 2 inches of compost adds a weight of 8.1 lbs per square foot. Using these values for weight and the compost application, a total of 227,000 tons of finished compost could theoretically be applied per year on our DOT landscapes. These numbers are provided as an illustration of the magnitude of compost that could be applied locally. Application rates need to be evaluated for each project to match the applicable soil type and characteristics.