

Incinerator

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mental Protection Agency. “The DEQ permit should reduce allowable particulate emissions, not allow an increase,” the groups wrote to DEQ.

Increased greenhouse gas emissions

The proposed permit doubles Covanta Marion’s greenhouse gas emissions allowance, from 107,100 to 214,000 tons per year.

Part of that is an accounting change: New EPA rules now require the incinerator to report emissions from burning biogenic materials, like wood waste. Previously it only reported emissions from anthropogenic, or man-made, materials, like plastic, though it burned both.

The new combined cap is 25% more than Covanta historically has emitted. “Major emitters of greenhouse gases like Covanta Marion must have decreasing amounts of permissible carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in order to align with the state of Oregon’s goals of statewide carbon reduction,” states the petition, signed by 125 health professionals and public health advocates.

Darling said DEQ typically sets emission limits at levels that a polluter could only reach if it operated at full steam, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It’s unlikely that Covanta would hit those ceilings, he said.

Covanta officials maintain that incineration emits less greenhouse gases than landfills.

“If the goal is to address climate change, you have a resource in your backyard doing that,” said Regan, the Covanta spokesman.

Environmental testing

In their letter, the groups say Covanta’s stack emissions are inadequately monitored.

They say emissions of dioxins and furans should be sampled more than annually or biannually, as is currently required. Dioxins accumulate in the food chain and can cause cancer and damage organs.

The petitioners want DEQ to measure actual concentrations of toxics in surrounding air, water and soil.

But Regan said “the plant has a stellar environmental record. It’s baffling why they’re so opposed to this facility.”

Accidental fires at incinerators

A December 2016 fire at a Covanta incinerator in Dickerson, Maryland took 11 days to fully extinguish. A February 2017 fire at a Covanta incinerator in Lorton, Virginia burned for days.

Some opponents of the proposed permit say that history should prompt DEQ to require Covanta Marion to prove it has adequate fire suppression capacity, and to have a fire emergency plan in place.

But DEQ doesn’t have authority to impose those requirements, Darling said.

Regan said the company has learned from those incidents, and as well-prepared as possible.

Opposing groups have requested a public hearing on the issues they’ve raised. DEQ officials said they are negotiating whether that will happen as part of the permit renewal process or later, perhaps as part of the Cleaner Air Oregon review.

The other organizations objecting to the proposed permit are: Woodburn-based PCUN, which advocates for farmworkers; Portland-based OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, which works on environmental justice issues; the climate groups 350 Salem and 350 PDX; Portland-based Neighbors for Clean Air and Eastside Portland Air Coalition; Eugene based Beyond Toxics; and Washington, D.C.-based Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives.

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Computer science jobs pay off



Catherine Hay
 Guest columnist

The information age has delivered self-driving cars, purchases with the swipe of a phone, friends video chatting across the globe, and other amazing technological advancements. However, many students in the digital era aren’t getting the computer science skills they need for career opportunities and essential life lessons.

Computer Science Education Week (December 9-15) offers a wonderful opportunity for parents, students, and schools to discuss the importance of computer courses in Oregon. Not all 21st-Century students want to become a software developer, but we should encourage them to learn about the technology that impacts their daily lives.

Why is computer science so important?

Oregon’s tech industry provides one of the fastest growing and highest paying career paths. Unfortunately, there’s a growing gap in the number of high-tech job openings compared to the number of skilled workers. The Governor’s STEM (Science Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Education Plan projected the gap at around 40,000 jobs in STEM-related fields, starting next year.

Employment researchers estimate computing occupations comprise nearly 60% of all new STEM positions. Annual salaries run up to \$117,000 for a computer information system manager in 2018 in Oregon.

Promoting computer science in schools not only addresses the state’s future workforce needs, but students benefit in other ways, including a resume boost when applying for college admissions or internships.

The founder of Code.org, Hadi Partovi, said in a recent interview, “We should teach computer science because it’s a foundational skill and prepares them (students) for life. In the 21st century, every industry, every field of science, every career is increasingly digitized, and students should know how the technology works.”

What do schools offer now?

Oregon is one of five states without a statewide plan to support students learning computer science. Only 37% of high schools around the state had at least one computer science class.

As the focus on STEM and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs has increased, so has computer science education. At Oregon Connections Academy, the online ASCEND program blazed a career pathway for students with classes like web and game design, computer programming, and soon cybersecurity. Students can also gain the industry certification most recognized

for tech support before they graduate, preparing them for internships their senior year.

Another example is Stayton High School’s new Career Pathways STEM option which includes courses in Tech/Helpdesk, C++ programming, and a 20-hour practicum.

Why are certain kids hesitant about computer science?

Some people believe Computer Science is only computer programming for “geeks” who sit in front of a screen for hours. Students learn problem-solving, analytical, and communication skills, along with confidence and other aspects that are important to any job today.

There is much to enjoy in computer science, whether it’s a build-your-own-computer project or a graphic design portfolio. For example, a 10-year-old Oregon Connections Academy student just assisted her parents fine-tuning a virtual reality app that allows other kids to learn the fundamentals of coding in a way that’s fun and easy to understand. She is having a blast with coding!

How crucial is coding? A Google education leader recently said, “Computer science is building the machines, developing the set of instructions that tell the machines what to do, and how all of this applies to solving the world problems.”

While computer science covers many areas, coding helps instruct the machines. The Hour of Code (hourofcode.com/us) is a worldwide effort is held during Computer Science in Education Week, but families can do it year-round. The Hour of Code is designed to show kids that computer science is problem-solving that can be fun and anyone can learn the basics.

What else can interest students in computer science?

There are many resources for families including libraries, and robotics teams. Here are a few suggestions for inexpensive digital platforms: Code.org –(studio.code.org/courses) CS First –(csfirst.withgoogle.com) CS Unplugged –(csunplugged.org) MakeCode –(microsoft.com/en-us/makecode) Scratch –(scratch.mit.edu)

I hope families consider these ideas during Computer Science in Education week or over winter break. Parents can use their own personal programming language to cultivate a child’s creative interests. Sparking a student’s curiosity in computer science is the first step on a potentially rewarding career ladder and other awesome benefits in a technology-based world.

Catherine Hay is a Oregon Connections Academy Master Teacher, ASCEND Computer Sciences Career and Technical Education program from Scappoose. Enrollment is ongoing for the 2019-2020 school year. For information please visit: www.OregonConnectionsAcademy.com or call (800) 382-6010.

“This plant deals with societal issues. We have to dispose of household waste. We have to deal with medical waste. This plant does it responsibly.”

James Regan
 Covanta spokesman



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Falls

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Rodrigue said.

“We can’t replicate everything at South Falls, like the lodge and gift shop, but I think it can be a smaller version of that and I would say that the new viewpoint location for North Falls is extremely impressive,” he said. “It’s on the opposite side of the canyon from where people are used to seeing it and has a really cool, high vantage point.”

From the new recreation site, a trail would connect either upstream or downstream from North Falls to the Trail of 10 Falls.

“We have a couple of alternatives that we’re looking at right now,” Rodrigue said.

This 2022 redevelopment is expected to be the first phase in a larger project on Silver Falls’ north side. A master plan for the park also calls for the creation of a new visitor’s center and expansion of the nature play area, but those would be years into the future, Rodrigue said.

For now, they’re hoping to have the redeveloped recreation site finished for 2022.

“We’re excited to share this new experience with visitor’s the park,” he said.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter, photographer and videographer in Oregon for 11 years. Urness is the author of “Best Hikes with Kids: Oregon” and “Hiking Southern Oregon.” He can be reached at zurness@Statesman-Journal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.