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Editorial

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Trash and cash

It is, as they say, a lead pipe cinch that none of the five communities which send refuse to that trash-to-energy plant in Wallingford is going to be looking this particular gift horse in the mouth.

Now that our clichés are out of the way, it is very well worth noting that this unexpected cash - at least unexpected by many who have followed processes at the trash-to-energy plant only peripherally - arrived by wire just three days before Thanksgiving. This cash, \$15.7 million, is a second distribution from plant operations. Back in April of 2009, a first installment of \$26 million was distributed to the five towns. This present distribution followed a regulation state audit of that contract under which this plant had been operating for 20 years.

You may recall that this plant has been a publically-owned facility which Connecticut Resource Recovery Authority hired a private company to operate. That company, Covanta, worked under a contract which expired earlier this year at the end of June. Before that date, though, after many months of negotiations, Covanta wound up purchasing the plant for just one dollar. As its new owner, Covanta continues to operate it under new

contracts with towns and these new arrangements seem to protect everyone's interests to their satisfaction. This is good: while a trash-to-energy plant isn't necessarily everyone's ideal of waste disposal, it suffices for now and is superior to most other options, such as piling an ever-increasing mound of rubbish in what will, eventually, become everyone's back yard.

But last week's cash, \$3.5 million for Meriden, \$2.1 million for Cheshire, \$3.6 million for Hamden, \$2.2 million for North Haven, and \$4.3 million for Wallingford (the host community) is a result of operations of this plant under the old system. While officials in various towns were not positive about plans for a welcome cash infusion, it's sure that none of these communities will have much trouble putting it to good use.

In Meriden's case, for instance, the city is looking at a possible shortfall in education funding for 2011-12 of \$11 million, and this money, if it can be reserved until then, would close a significant portion of that expected gap. Regardless of its ultimate destination, though, this is money which should lighten up this holiday season all around.