

Anti-incineration towns stress togetherness

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

Incineration was once a hot Oakland County topic, but some community leaders are now getting cold feet.

Incinerator plans were put on hold — perhaps for good — when industrial plant Westinghouse backed out of its contract to build the county waste-to-energy plant.

Before they seek a replacement, county officials are asking whether communities are still interested in incineration. For many, the answer could be no.

"I believe it's time we looked again at the three R's (reduce, reuse and recycling)," Rochester Hills Mayor Billie Ireland said.

Ireland's opposition is no surprise. Last year, Rochester Hills residents aggressively campaigned against the nearby Auburn Hills incinerator site — fearing falling ash and toxic discharges would ruin their suburban neighborhoods.

But these days, Rochester Hills of-

icials aren't the only ones urging the county to consider other options. Recycling is also getting a boost from West Bloomfield Supervisor Sandra Draur.

"IF WE MAKE a commitment to recycling, we may find we don't need to build an incinerator, or at least build one so big," she said. Draur found little support for the incinerator among other members of the county townships association.

"Only one township signed the IGA (intergovernmental agreement authorizing the incinerator) and that was Addison," she said. "One of the major issues for all of us is what is it going to cost."

Cost is "the big factor" Bloomfield Township administrative assistant Dave Payne agreed.

"We're waiting to see what the county proposes," he said. Other communities are acting on their own.

"We're really kind of a non-participant (in the county plan)," Birmingham City Manager Thomas Markus

said. Birmingham, is one of the communities which belong to the South Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority (SOCHRA).

SOCHRA, which operated a now-closed Madison Heights incinerator, is investigating building another one of its own, Markus said.

Southfield, a member of another eight-community waste disposal group, is waiting to discuss the issue with other communities.

"We're going to be meeting with other members of RRHRSOC (Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County)," public works director Thomas Vukovich said.

Farmington Hills City manager William Costick said he'd like to see the county back creation of a new landfill.

"I'm convinced the future is in landfills," said Costick, whose city is also a RRHRSOC member. "The technology is there to make landfills safe and, we're seeing that landfills

can be built at half the cost of incinerators."

TEN YEARS AGO, Costick said, the state Department of Natural Resources was proposing incinerators as a safe alternative to waste burying. "Now, it's just the other way around."

Oakland officials have been pushing incineration at least that long — an early 1980s plan called for small incinerators scattered throughout the county — but have met resistance all along the way. Not so long ago, a county owned and operated landfill was also part of the plan, but that met major resistance from targeted communities.

Still, there is no guarantee alternatives would prove less controversial.

Birmingham, Southfield, Bloomfield Township, Bingham Farms, West Bloomfield and Farmington Hills, among other communities, have already introduced curbside re-

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— Sandra Draur
West Bloomfield Supervisor

cycling

Even if all Oakland communities eventually made recycling mandatory, experts believe there would still be a need for landfills.

Landfill permits are difficult to obtain, however, and counties are increasingly less likely to share their landfill space with others.

"These restriction on cross county

landfill use are just silly," Costick said. "We've all got to work together."

Togetherness is the key, Ireland agreed.

"Whatever we do, we should do it together," she said. "You can't expect communities to solve the solid waste problem on their own."

Oakland chambers network

Oakland County chambers of commerce are getting together for a Tuesday, March 24, business networking event billed as the county's biggest business card exchange this year.

The event is scheduled for 6-8 p.m. at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle, 259

E. Fourth, Royal Oak.

Reservations are \$10 per person and can be made by calling the Council of Chambers of Commerce of Oakland County, 557-8400. The council is at 16250 Northland Drive, Southfield.

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