

State won't permit incinerator before vote

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

News this week about Oakland's proposed \$500 million solid waste program was bad and good, according to county commissioners.

The bad news is state officials will not give Oakland a permit for its proposed incinerator in Auburn Hills before residents vote on financing the program Nov. 5.

The good news is the Detroit Edison Co. is willing to pay \$10 million a year for electricity generated by the controversial waste-to-energy incinerator. . . If it's ever operational.

The news was indeed a mixed bag, with commissioners not certain about which bit of information is more important in the long run. Not having an operating permit puts commissioners in a position they'd rather not be in — asking voters to approve financing for the waste program before they have a permit to operate the incinerator from the Michigan Air Pollution Control Commission.

The commission can't issue the permit until the Michigan Department of Natural Resources makes a recommendation on the incinerator, explained Ann Hobart, public information officer for the solid waste program.

And the DNR won't make a recommendation until the state establishes a policy on mercury emissions from incinerators — something that could take four months or longer.

OAKLAND APPLIED for its operating permit in December, 1989, and commissioners scheduled the vote on financing the solid waste program in November, rather than August, hoping it would be approved by then.

Some commissioners even insisted the vote should be canceled if the permit was not approved by then. "There's no sense voting on an incinerator if we don't have a permit to operate it," commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick said at that time.

When contacted Wednesday, Pernick seemed less certain. "I want to get more information about why we won't have the permit before I comment," said the Southfield Democrat.

Other commissioners, however, seemed committed to going ahead with the Nov. 5 vote — with the stipulation that no incinerator would be built without a state permit. "I don't see any way around it," said commissioner Donald E. Bishop, R-Rochester Hills. "We have to go ahead with the vote . . . we should have vote on this a long time ago."

Bishop said he opposes the incinerator. He said he hopes not having the operating permit would prompt his colleagues to again consider a measure backed by a number of commissioners.

Bishop favors putting two ballot proposals before voters. One would authorize the sale of bonds for a waste program with an incinerator. The second would propose the sale of

bonds for a program without the incinerator.

Putting two issues before the voters is something staunchly opposed by Commissioner Roy Rewold, R-Oakland Township, and others who insist the incinerator would be a vital part of any comprehensive solid waste program.

They say not having an incinerator would force the county to build an incinerator or landfill in five years or less.

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Mary Desfarnals and her husband of Birmingham say they collected more than 500 signatures on petitions to recall Gov. John Engler over the weekend at the Michigan State Fair.

Dorothy Habicht of the City of Wayne says she collected about 300, mostly from people enjoying the Labor Day weekend at Belle Isle. "We're going to make it," asserted Habicht, a single parent who said she previously collected 2,000 signatures.

These are two examples of why area residents working on the petition drive to oust Engler are confident the "big push" for signatures over the last two weeks has been successful and they have more than the 641,141 needed to put a recall on the ballot.

But they won't know for sure until

organizers in Lansing finish counting and announce the results, possibly as early as late Wednesday.

Robert Alexander, state coordinator of the recall, was unavailable Tuesday and Wednesday and did not return phone calls.

A recorded message, however, said: "We're counting signatures. If we have 800,000, we'll file. If not, we'll extend one week."

The original deadline was Aug. 20, when organizers claimed to have all most enough signatures for the recall. But they extended the deadline to Sept. 3 and called for one "big push" to guarantee 800,000 signatures.

That 800,000 — more than 150,000

more than the minimum number needed — is a goal Alexander and others active in the recall imposed on themselves. The extras are needed, they say, to make up for any signatures that may be invalidated when the petitions are certified by the state board of canvassers.

The recall effort started in May as a reaction to across-the-board budget cuts that cut basic state services and trimmed welfare benefits.

People like Mary M. Johnson of Farmington Hills and Vic Taylor of Livonia say they are active in the recall because the budget cuts reduce important state functions — like protecting the environment — in addition to taking much-needed assist-

missioners. It calls for Edison to pay 3.5 cents per kilowatt hour of electricity, a price Crake said would generate about \$10 million annually, or about 25 percent of the expected operating costs.

As proposed, the Auburn Hills incinerator could burn up to 2,000 tons of trash a day and generate enough electricity to provide power to 60,000 homes each year, according to Hobart.

ance from the disadvantaged, like the disabled and families with children.

State Republicans on Wednesday, however, again declared the recall a failure and insisted most residents approve of Engler's budget-cutting policies.

"This recall thing was never the mass movement the organizers made it out to be," said Bryan Flood, press secretary for the Michigan GOP. The majority of residents voted Gov. Engler into office because he said he'd cut needless spending. They like the fact that he's living up to his campaign promises."

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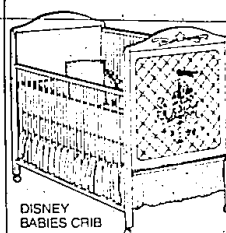
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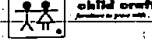
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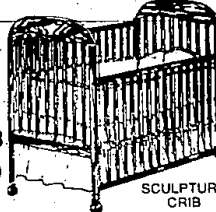
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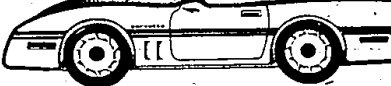
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