

# Oakland program has lofty recycling goals

On Nov. 5, Oakland voters will decide a ballot proposal to finance the proposed \$50 million solid waste program, the most expensive in county history. This is part of a continuing series on the solid waste program and the controversy it has generated.  
By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

In the furor over the Auburn Hills incinerator — the most controversial part of the proposed solid waste program — one major fact is frequently overlooked, according to officials close to the project.



Oakland's proposed solid waste plan relies as much on recycling as it does on the waste-to-energy incinerator. The plan calls for recycling 50 percent of the 3,700 tons of municipal waste generated daily, with the remaining 50 percent being

burned or landfilled.

It's a bit like the rhetorical question about the glass of water holding 50 percent of its capacity. Is it half empty? Or half full?

Is Oakland's program for recycling? Or incineration?  
"Critics say the county must recycle more aggressively," said James M. Brennan, director of the county's program evaluation and operations analysis. "But I'll tell you this, no recycling program is more aggressive than Oakland County's."

THAT KIND of talk is encouraging to groups like the Environmental

Protection Council . . . but not convincing.

"We're thrilled when the county talks about recycling 50 percent of its waste stream," said Michael A. Schwartz, a West Bloomfield Township lawyer who is EPC chairman. "We don't believe the county will be able to do it."

Even if Oakland could recycle 50 percent of its trash, some critics are convinced it won't. "Once you're committed to an incinerator, you're committed to feed it," summarized Carol T. Izant, outreach coordinator for the Zero Discharge Alliance, one of a growing number of organiza-

tions opposed to incinerator.

Like Schwartz and others, Izant is convinced once Oakland builds an incinerator, efforts to recycle will be secondary. "Mainly because it's easier to burn trash than recycle it," said the Southfield resident.

"People who say Oakland will incinerate instead of recycling just don't understand the size of our trash problem," asserts Roger Smith, deputy director of Oakland's solid waste management division. "We are generating so much trash, that even after we've recycled 50 percent of the waste stream, we'll have more than enough to keep the incinerator busy."

Smith predicts the amount of trash Oakland generates daily will increase from 3,700 tons (in 1991) to 4,591 tons by the year 2010. "Even if we are successful in recycling 50 percent, that still leaves about 2,200 tons. The question is, do we incinerate it? Or landfill it?"

TO EXPLAIN their suspicion of Oakland's commitment to recycling, critics point to a clause in the Inter-governmental Agreements — the contracts that commit a individual community to mandatory recycling. That clause stipulates the county can burn materials that can be recycled when there is no market for that material.

That's the county's escape clause, insists Izant. "Many times the markets aren't there, so that give the county a legal basis to burn something rather than recycle," she said.

Smith, however, said that clause doesn't indicate a preference on the part of the county, but a concession to reality. "If the market isn't there — for an item like paper — we go to burn it. We certainly won't store it, or put it in a landfill. But our goal is to recycle."

And an ambitious goal it is, according to Michael E. Sheward, manager of public affairs for the National Solid Wastes Management Association. "Right now, communities are recycling between 10 and 25 percent of their waste stream," he said. "They may have set higher goals for themselves in the future, but achieving it is another matter."

OAKLAND is confident, however, that it can achieve its goal of 50 percent recycling. The big reason is the \$16 million Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) slated to be built near the proposed incinerator in Auburn Hills.

"That's a recycling factory," said Brennan, referring to the facility to be run by Waste Management Inc., one of the world's most experienced trash handlers.

## State tax booklet will be later this year

Michigan taxpayers will get their 1991 State Income Tax Booklets in the mail on Dec. 13 this year instead of early November.

"This is essentially a cost-cutting move designed to save the state the cost of duplicating mailings and early printing costs," said treasurer Douglas Roberts.

Those who file in late December

or early January for their property tax and home heating credits can still expect about a three-week turnaround time on their refunds.

But district offices will no longer prepare forms for citizens as they have in the past due to staff shortages, Roberts said. Staff will be available to answer general questions and to refer citizens to volun-

teer groups providing preparation services. Staff will continue to provide training to volunteer groups so they can provide good service to citizens, he said.

Also, taxpayers who do not receive their booklets at home will be able to pick up forms at district offices throughout the state. "We will be adding additional toll-free

telephone lines enabling citizens to contact the Department should they have questions on the tax forms," Roberts said.

Forms can be obtained by calling the FORMS-2-ME toll-free line at 800-367-8263, or at Secretary of State offices, libraries, post offices and banks throughout the state

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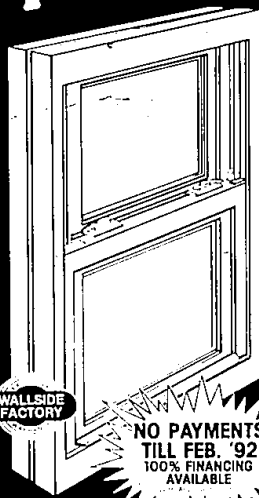
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