

County plans for disposal of its waste

This is the first in a series of articles looking at Oakland County's multimillion dollar plan for getting rid of its trash.

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Imagine a jigsaw puzzle with numerous oddly-shaped components — none of which seem to fit.

At first glance, that seems to be an appropriate analogy for the myriad of incinerators, landfills, recycling centers — existing or planned — designed to help Oakland County deal with the 3,677 tons of waste generated within its boundaries every day.

Consider the following items:

- In Troy, residents and city officials are struggling with a recently implemented program requiring single-family residents to separate household garbage from grass clippings and leaves.

- In Birmingham and the Bloomfields, a small percentage of residents and non-residents take glass, metal cans, plastic jugs and newspapers to a recycling center for processing and, it is hoped, resale. The majority of residents, however, still depend on traditional curbside pickup of unseparated trash — with the exception of Beverly Hills and Birmingham which require separate bags for yard clippings.

- In the Haggerty Road and 10 Mile area, the communities of Farmington, Farmington Hills, Southfield, Walled Lake, Westland and South Lyon have formed the Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County. Possibly as early as next year, they hope to begin construction of a \$28 million Material Recovery Facility (MRF). Once in operation, it will require, among other things, that residents sort and separate trash as a condition of pickup.

THESE SEEMINGLY unrelated items have at least one thing in common: They are a harbinger of things to come.

Within five years or so, nearly every community in Oakland County will have — or be planning to have — a system requiring residents to sort trash, according to Roger J. Smith, deputy director of Oakland County's solid waste department.

Gone will be the days residents could casually take trash out for curbside pickup or contract with private haulers to cart it away once a week.

Residents may still hire private haulers, Smith said. But even they will have to separate cans, bottles, plastics, newspapers and grass clippings so they can be recycled or incinerated.

"Money is part of it," said Smith, who predicts the cost of rubbish disposal for the average household in Oakland County currently about \$130 per year — will double or triple in the near future.

As critical as money may be, community pride may be equally as important in the county's solid waste management plan, according to Oakland County commissioner Roy Rewold, R-Rochester.

"Oakland County is a leader on this issue," said Rewold, who is head of the county's Solid Waste Task Force as well as chairman of the county board of commissioners.

THAT DOESN'T mean the county's program doesn't have problems, Rewold said Tuesday during a meeting of the solid waste task force. "At times we've floundered and seemed to grasp for straws," he said. "But I think we're on track" and the end result will be beneficial to the entire community.

Another member of the task force wasn't so sure, however.

"I think the county has a credibility problem," said James G. Meenahan, a General Motors engineer who is chairman of the county's solid waste planning committee.

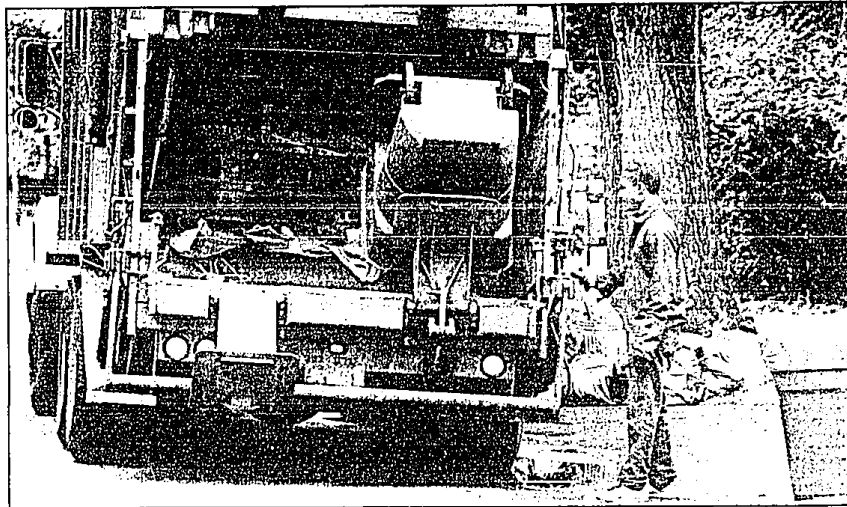
The county's credibility problem may be so great, he said, that residents in northern Oakland County seem to be on the verge of what he called a revolt. "There's a line between opposition and open revolt," Meenahan said at Tuesday's meeting. "We may have crossed it."

Meenahan, who has been involved in solid waste planning for almost two decades, said he has never before seen opposition like he has encountered in areas like Highland, Oxford and Addison townships.

"People up there are angry," he said, referring to communities near the five sites under consideration for a landfill the county plans to install as a key component of its solid waste management program.

Not only do those residents object to any landfill within their neighborhoods, Meenahan said, "They are suspicious. They (residents) believe that if the county gets the landfill, it will abandon or neglect efforts to recycle."

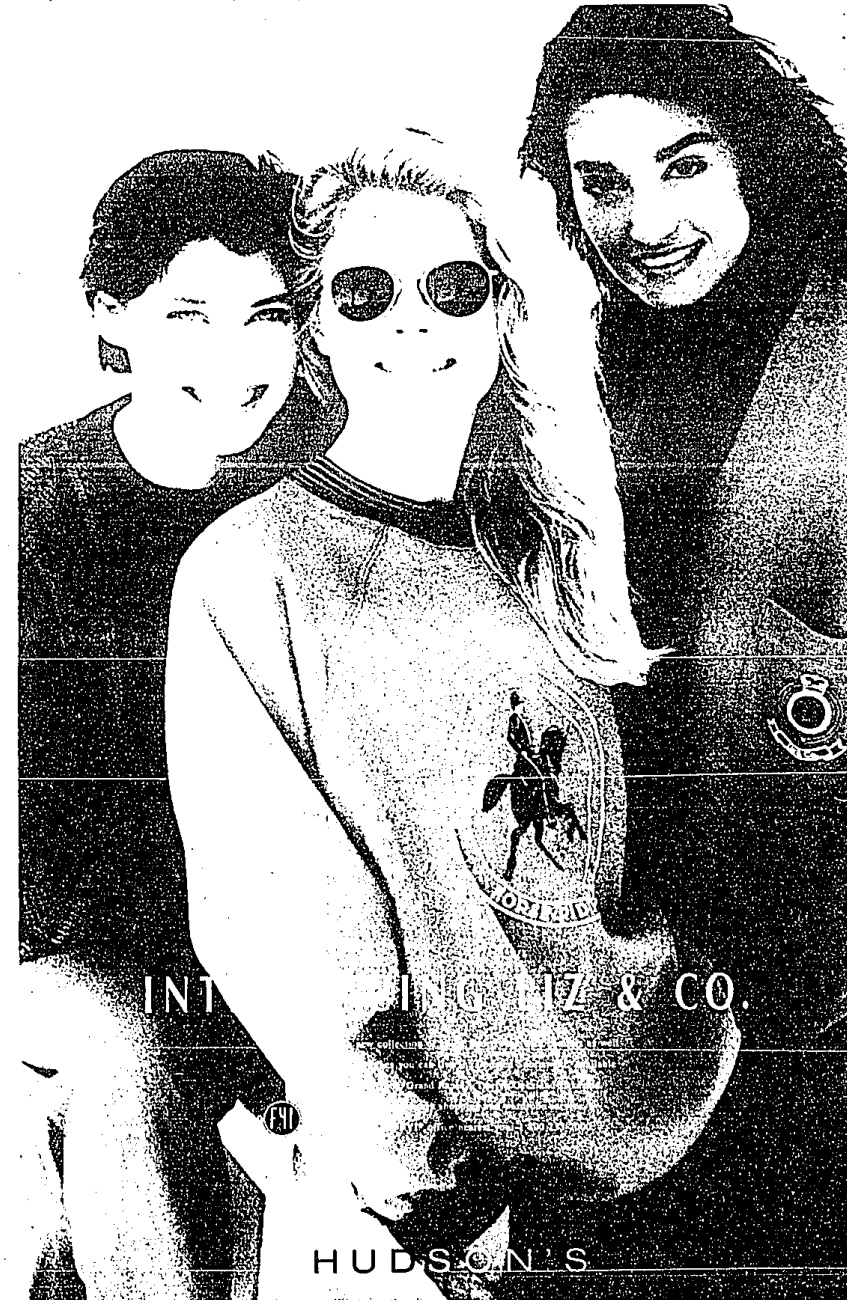
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STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

One day soon, curbside trash pickup will change, and Oakland County residents will be called upon to separate their trash.

Some communities already require separation of yard clippings and their placement in biodegradable bags.



...some object to government taking on trash

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Not everyone agrees with Oakland County's approach to handling solid waste.

State Rep. Mat Dunaskiss, for example, insists the county — and most governments for that matter — should stay out of the waste management business.

The private sector can address the problem more efficiently, said Dunaskiss, chairman of the House Republican Recycling Task Force. "It is a well-known fact in the waste industry that the private sector not only has proven to be most efficient, but is also developing new techniques and alternatives for waste disposal, usually not possible in a public enterprise," Dunaskiss wrote in a letter to Roy Rewold, chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

The letter was signed by Dunaskiss' Republican colleagues in the house, Judith Miller, Birmingham; David Honigman, West Bloomfield; Willis C. Bullard, Highland Township and John Strand, Lapeer.

THE DUNASKISS LETTER said companies — like BFI Waste Systems and Waste Management Co., two of the world's largest waste management companies with local offices in Livonia — should be encouraged to come up with innovative solutions.

"Here we are, the wealthiest county in Michigan, in an era of high tech," Dunaskiss said, "and the best we came up with is to burn it (solid

The letter was signed by Dunaskiss' Republican colleagues in the house.

waste) or put it in a big hole in the ground."

He was referring, of course, to incineration and landfills, two major components of Oakland County's plan to manage solid waste. Two sites within his district are top contenders to hold the Oakland County landfill.

As an example of more innovative approaches, Dunaskiss points to companies like Newst Inc. of Reno, Nev., that recently signed a contract with Gilbratter, in the downriver Detroit area, for a demonstration program to convert solid waste into fuel pellets or soil supplements to replace fertilizer.

However Oakland County handles its waste, Dunaskiss said, it should take a cautious, prudent approach. "The county should go slow," he said, making sure taxpayers aren't forced to eventually pick up the tab for ill-conceived waste disposal systems.

Dunaskiss has threatened to sue the county, if necessary, if officials issue general obligation bonds to build an incinerator without a vote of the people.

He insists issuing general obligation bonds without getting voter approval would be a violation of the Headlee tax limitation amendment.

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