

MRF for recycling

County teams up with private enterprise

By Pal Murphy
staff writer

This is the third in a series of articles looking at Oakland County's program for managing solid waste, a plan for which county officials are prepared to spend \$470 million. Much of that plan calls for recycling trash in a county-owned materials recovery facility, or MRF.

Like other parts of its trash program, the \$11 million materials recovery facility (MRF) will be owned and financed by Oakland County but built and operated by a private waste management company.

The sale of recycled materials — and tipping fees — are expected to cover operating expenses.

MRF and other recycling efforts — private and governmental — are expected to handle about 35 percent of the 3.677 tons of trash generated within Oakland County daily.

The county's MRF will be on about 10 acres southwest of Giddings and Brown roads in Auburn Hills, next to the county's 2,000-ton-per-day incinerator. The site is next to the county's animal shelter and trustee camp.

Trash brought in from municipal and commercial customers will be required to have some pre-sorting, such as separating glass from plastic from metal.

But the MRF will have some sorting capacity.

For additional stories on recycling efforts, please turn to Page 9A.

CARDBOARD WILL BE baled and sold to paper companies, according to Roger J. Smith, deputy director of the county's solid waste program. Glass will be ground up for resale to commercial users.

"The purer the materials, the better price we can get for them," Smith said. "So glass, for example, may have to be further sorted by color. But sorting will be required, first by residents and then at the MRF."

Marketing the recycled materials is an uncertain business, subject to market pressures and price fluctuations, said Smith.

At times, markets are so attractive that prices help offset tipping fees, Smith said. At other times, markets are depressed, requiring that MRFs and other recycling facilities to pay companies to reuse recovered materials.

"Newspapers are a good example," he said. Sometimes the market will buy all recycled newsprint available. A glutted market, on the other hand, can require that MRFs pay paper companies.

"Either way, it's still cheaper to recycle than to incinerate or landfill," he said.

STATE AND FEDERAL governments periodically pass legislation designed to bolster the recycling market — such as a recent Michigan law granting incentives to companies that use recycled goods.

Smith cited that kind of legislation as an example of how the market for recycled goods can be influenced externally.

Another factor strengthening recycling is improved technology. The more efficiently companies can recycle glass, for example, the greater is the incentive for communities or private companies to process it.

Smith said Oakland County recognizes that variance in the way it is bidding the contract to build and operate its MRF. As a condition for operating the MRF, the company must find buyers for recycled goods.

Four separate companies are currently negotiating to build and operate Oakland County's MRF. They are:

- Empire Returns Corp., Syracuse, N.Y.
- Westinghouse Electric Rfnc. North Billerica, Mass.
- Browning-Ferris Industries, Livonia.
- Waste Management, Inc., Southfield.

While each company will be obligated to find buyers for materials recycled at Oakland's MRF, Waste Management has entered into a joint venture with the Dupont Co.

THAT VENTURE, called the Plastic Recycling Alliance, calls for Dupont and Waste Management to each finance 50 percent of three plastic processing centers, according to Ryan F. McKendrick, operations manager for the alliance.

In 1990, he said, the alliance expects to have centers capable of annually recycling up to 30 tons of high grade plastics from soda bottles, milk jugs and laundry detergent containers.

NEXT, A look at the county's planned landfill, the most expensive part of the county's trash management proposal that has already generated opposition, suspicion and the threat of law suits.

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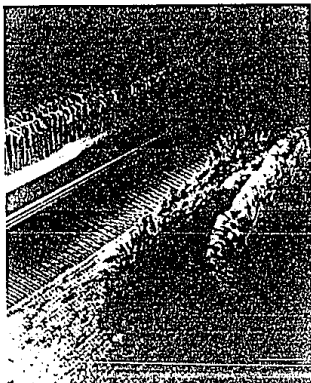
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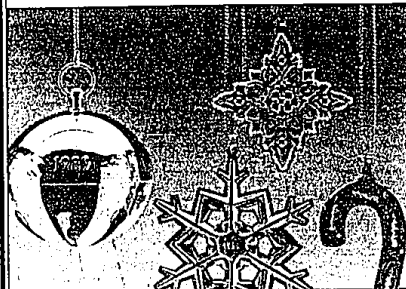
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