

## **Taking care of solid waste in Santa Fe County**

Dear Santa Fe County residents:

I would like to bring you up-to-date on recent initiatives in the area of handling solid waste in Santa Fe County, as well as to solicit your feedback on several issues.

Several months ago, the Board of County Commissioners convened a Solid Waste Task Force in order to look at ways to improve how solid waste is handled in the County and to investigate how to improve the rate of recycling trash. The Task Force is comprised of 5 County residents representing the 5 different districts, along with Commissioner Danny Mayfield and myself. Also participating are Adam Leigland, Public Works Director; Olivar Barela, Solid Waste Utility Manager; Les Francisco, Solid Waste Supervisor; Robert Martinez, Transportation and Solid Waste Director; Teresa Martinez, a representative from the Finance Department; and Victor Montoya, County Treasurer.

The purpose of the Task Force is threefold:

- 1) to investigate how to make the solid waste services fiscally sound,
- 2) to improve the rate of recycling, and
- 3) to improve the quality of services.

The Task Force has met twice, and at the end of the last meeting there was a consensus that before proceeding further, we need to understand just what is going on with solid waste handling in the unincorporated areas of the County. Right now, far less than half the people actually use the Transfer Stations. Around 60% or more of the households contract with a private hauler (and there are several different ones that operate in different areas). Any solutions that the Task Force identifies to improve our services must take into account all the solid waste generated in the County, not just what goes through the Transfer Stations.

The staff will work to answer the following questions:

- 1) How much solid waste is generated in different areas of the unincorporated County?
- 2) What is the percentage (by tonnage) of solid waste produced by commercial, residential, and construction/demolition sources?
- 3) What percentage of solid waste is potentially recyclable or reusable?
- 4) What percentage is green waste?
- 5) What percentage must go to the landfill?
- 6) Are there seasonal variations?

Staff will also identify who the private haulers are in the County, as well as what areas they operate in and how much waste they handle.

When the information is gathered, the Task Force will be asking a number of questions as to how the County can specifically move forward in improving how solid waste is handled, both fiscally and in quality of service.

- 1) Should the County establish franchises or permits for private haulers?
- 2) What are the appropriate roles for the County and for the Solid Waste Management Authority, the joint Santa Fe City/County Authority that manages the landfill and the Buckman Recycling and Transfer Station?
- 3) Should the County expand the collection of recyclables?
- 4) Should the County require that in certain areas business and residences must participate in a collection service, as now happens in the City?
- 5) How can the County promote more reuse of materials from construction and demolition sites?
- 6) What other materials can be recovered for reuse and recycling?

In the end, the Task Force will write a report that details recommendations that will go to the BCC. In addition, the BCC might draft ordinances that come out of the process.

I would be grateful for feedback from you on priorities for the following points:

- 1) How important is cost to you?
- 2) How important is improved service?
- 3) How important is convenience (i.e., hours of operation)?
- 4) What do you see as barriers to recycling (i.e., cost or convenience)?
- 5) For those of you currently using the Transfer Stations, would you be interested in a pick-up service at your home that was reasonably priced (\$15 - \$20 per month) and that picked up recyclables as well as landfill trash?

Of course, I know that people want each one of those items to be maximized, but there are often trade-offs, so it would be good for us to know your priorities.

One thing I can promise you is that solid waste disposal will not be free. Many people remember the "good old days" some years ago when disposing of solid waste was (practically) free. There

were dumps all over the County where people could bring all their trash: a backhoe operator would dig a hole in the ground, and then bury the trash, with no thought given to what would happen to any toxic materials, or whether they might eventually contaminate the groundwater in the area.

Now we have a managed landfill site, where there are strict regulations on how the cells (dumping sites) must be lined to protect the groundwater. There are also regulations for dealing with the gases that are generated from the compacted trash in a cell so that the air quality is preserved. All this costs money, paid for by you, the taxpayers. There are a number of ways that we can generate the revenue to cover the costs, and the Task Force will be looking at options. We will also be looking at ways to maximize efficiency -- that is, to get the best bang for our trash-disposal buck. But, understand that trash disposal can no longer be free: Our population has grown too much, and the consequences of so-called "free" dumping are too dangerous and therefore, too costly.

I welcome your feedback and comments.

I would also like to let you know that the meetings of the Solid Waste Task Force are open to the public. The next one is scheduled for this coming Wednesday, September 26th, at 3:00 p.m. in the County's Public Works Building off of State Route 599.

Sincerely,  
-Kathy

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