

Dear Santa Fe County residents:

There are going to be two proposed amendments to our Solid Waste Ordinance coming up for discussion at the next BCC meeting. I would like to give you a broader picture of the subject, so you will understand what my position is.

One of the amendments is to create a 12-punch pass for \$40 for this fiscal year, and the other is to extend the use of the 24-punch passes so that they can continue to be used until they run out.

While these might seem to be reasonable suggestions, I believe that they will create unintended detrimental consequences: First of all, both of these amendments will promote an inevitable increase in solid waste disposal, which will end up costing all of us taxpayers more and more money in the long run. Secondly, both of these seemingly innocuous amendments will discourage recycling, which is the only practical way to extend significantly the life of the landfill.

Let me explain why this is so. Santa Fe County has a very expensive landfill, due to its having been sited on top of basalt rock, rather than dirt. Construction of a new cell -- into which solid waste is dumped and compacted -- is therefore very expensive. Why? Basalt rock has to be blasted out, not just excavated like dirt. Moreover, to add insult to injury, the local Solid Waste Management Authority (SWAMA) has to pay royalty fees to the US Bureau of Land Management for the basalt, since it can be used in road construction projects, and since BLM owns the mineral rights on the land.

On the other hand, while landfilling is expensive, SWAMA receives money for recyclables, helping to defray the costs for running the landfill.

The bad news is that, in Santa Fe County, we only recycle 10% of our solid waste. Compare that with Los Alamos County, whose landfill is now full and closed: They recycle 40% and have to ship the remainder out of Los Alamos County. Clearly, we in Santa Fe County are missing the boat. The more recycling we do, the more it will help our bottom line, and the longer will be our landfill's lifetime.

Unfortunately, the way that we have structured our fees does not encourage recycling as much as it could. It seems that only those people who are really committed do it.

Most of the people in the unincorporated area of the County (around 60%) use private hauling services. At least one of these companies even charges more for picking up recyclables.

For homeowners going to the Transfer Stations, there are presently two options. One is to buy a 24-punch pass for \$75. The other is to recycle everything possible for free -- yes, it costs nothing whatsoever to recycle! -- and to then use bag tags (only \$1.00 per bag!) for the rest. For example, most of the trash that my husband and I generate (both by weight and by volume) is recyclable, and we spend under \$25 per year for all of our solid waste disposal that goes into the landfill. (We also dispose our food scraps in a compost pile for later use in the garden, so that the landfill bags contain mostly dry, non-recyclable material.)

The County runs seven transfer stations at great expense. Part of the gross receipts tax in the County is

dedicated to environmental purposes, but that money covers only half the cost of the transfer stations. The Solid Waste Task Force, which was convened year before last, came up with the idea of having one permit fee that would get the County closer to breaking even. The cost of the punch pass was raised \$10 a year ago, with the price increasing another \$10 a year for four more years. The number of punches was raised to 24 so that people would not be motivated to hoard trash.

Just as a point of comparison, most neighboring counties do not have as many transfer stations, and they charge considerably more for passes than does Santa Fe County.

I suggest that Santa Fe County ought to go through a comprehensive planning process for our solid waste disposal program. An example of things to consider would be to have a County solid-waste pick-up program (optional, not mandated) that is not only cheaper than private companies, but also picks up recyclables, and helps subsidize the transfer stations. Those who want to recycle most of their trash and use bag tags for the rest, would be encouraged to continue as before.

My goals for a comprehensive solution are as follows:

- 1) Maximize recycling,
- 2) Minimize use of expensive landfill and extend its useful lifetime,
- 3) Subsidize people who truly need help with their bills, and
- 4) Provide a low-cost pick up option (at least for those County residents in accessible areas).

I believe that, with good planning, we can minimize the long-term costs of solid waste disposal for everybody in the County. At the same time, we can increase the rate of recycling and thereby do the right thing -- namely, help save our environment.

Sincerely,
-Kathy

-Kathy Holian
4 Camino Cielo Azul
Santa Fe, NM 87508
505-995-9979
Kathleen.Holian@comcast.net