

Trash is money: the business of landfills research paper

Countries, United States



If one rents, trash removal is calculated into one's monthly charge. If one owns, in one way or another, one pays for trash to be removed from one's dwelling. Waste Management, the largest trash business in the United States, is a member of the Fortune 500. Trash is big business. In many areas, having a municipal job in sanitation is a stable job with good pay and benefits. It may not be glamorous, but it is an honest living for most. Since, in general, the more people that live in a domicile, the more trash is produced, many locals are moving away from a flat fee per house or unit and trying to find a more equitable way to pay for the convenience of having one's trash removed. In the United States, many local governments have turned to unit pricing in an effort to reduce the amount of solid waste produced and therefore the amount of solid waste that needs to be disposed of and paid for by the local government. Unit pricing, otherwise known as pay by the bag, is also considered to be more fair by many sense people that produce more trash are been paying more with every move all of their trash. In most cases, the pickup of recyclable materials is still free. This also encourages residents to use the recycling program rather than just discarding items that could be recycled (Halstead, Huang, and Saunders 401).

When a government agency needs to know more about trash they can call and expert on trash. Richard Magee is probably United States most expert person on incineration. Although he trained as a mechanical engineer his greatest contributions and life have been in public health.

In the late 1970s, Magee experience working with the Metro system in Washington D. C. let into his work of studying how waste materials burned

(Morrison 1560). Before this time, most solid waste produced United States was either buried or dumped into landfills. Residents who lived near landfills were putting pressure on local officials to do something about the massive amounts of trash that were being deposited daily into the landfills in their backyards. Local governments asked Magee about the feasibility of burning their municipal waste, later burning medical waste was explored, and eventually Magee was contracted by the government as part of the team to incinerate chemical weapons. Magee states that he has been “ carrying a flame” for combustion for 40 years.

In 1991 he was appointed to the National Research Council and their program for disposing of chemical weapons. In 1985, Congress directed the Army to destroy the stockpile of chemical weapons that the United States had. In 1993, United States signed the Chemical Weapons Convention Treaty in which it agreed to get rid of the stockpiles by 2012. Initially it was thought it would take a decade and \$1. 7 billion to comply with the treaty. It is now than two decades and \$30 billion later and all of the chemical weapons are still not destroyed. The program may not be finished until 2016. The Army is using incineration to destroy the weapons, but being that the chemicals were stored in more than 3 million individual containers and the process has been long and arduous.

The public was against incineration this program began. Part of Magee's role was to meet with citizen groups and answer questions about safety concerns and public health. Some of these meetings became hostile because people were fearful. When people feel their environment is being threatened, they are full of emotion. Frequently Magee and other Army officials were accused

of being frauds and liars because the incineration process was not occurring in their backyards. Magee feels that he spent his lifetime spending taxpayer money wisely and protecting the public and their health (Morrison 1561). Local and state governments sometimes get the courts involved to settle contract disputes. Much of the reason behind the legal actions is because a large amount of money that is involved in these transactions and the extra expenses incurred by the party who sues when alternative arrangements need to be made. In a case between the states of North Carolina and Alabama, the appeals process went all the way to the Supreme Court. The basic background of the case is that there was an agreement between the states of Virginia, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Mississippi. Two members from each state set on the board overseeing a contract which dealt with the disposal of low-level radioactive waste. When the contract was initiated, the waste went to a site in South Carolina. That site was scheduled to close in 1992. In 1998, North Carolina asked the commission that handled the contract for financial assistance to obtain a license to build the facility where radioactive waste could be disposed of after the South Carolina facility closed in 1992. The commission granted North Carolina \$80 million towards obtaining a license and the state of North Carolina also invested \$34 million in trying to obtain the license for the facility. By 1997, despite all efforts in trying to obtain a license, they were still far from being able to get one, so an orderly shutdown of the facility in the process was instituted. For several more years North Carolina spent its own money continuing trying to obtain a license and maintaining the facility but did not respond to the commission's lawsuit for \$80 million in which it

was trying to seek restitution for the money it is vested. In the end, the Supreme Court found that North Carolina was not liable to repay the \$80 million because it did attempt to fulfill its obligations to the commission (U. S. Supreme Court 3. 9).

Sludge is not a word that is found on most third grade spelling lists. But, if you live in a town near a wastewater treatment facility, many of the children in the third grade class will know what it means. Companies operating wastewater treatment facilities have sludge as one of the biggest problems that they face. These companies are constantly looking for a solution to fix this problem the investment spent by these facilities seeking an answer is enormous, but when the solution is found, communities will be safer, public health will improve, and eventually more areas will be open to having such facilities in their region because this environmental hazard will have a safe answer.

When wastewater is treated, solids are produced. In recent years, the amount of solids produced has increased. These solids are an expensive problem and are closely regulated by the government because of the health concerns associated with them. These solids contained heavy metals, toxins, viruses, cysts, and pathogenic organisms. It's no wonder communities do not want these treatment facilities in their backyards. There's a definite incentive to find a way to reduce the amount of solid waste when treating wastewater as it would save the facilities which in turn would save reduce calories which in turn would save residents billions of dollars a year (Richardson, Egemen, Hanson, and Hernandez 247). In their study, Richard et al. reported that “ The results of this research suggest that reductions in

the quantities of waste secondary sludge can be achieved using ozonation of waste and/or return activated sludge. The extent of solids reduction will depend on the amount and frequency of ozone applied to induce cell lysis” (255).

People don't realize that is not safe to just throw away their old consumer electronic devices. Some of these contain toxic materials and heavy metal and therefore are a threat to the environment. Also, contained inside, there are potential raw materials that could be valuable and reused. There are now some states and some private companies that are making big business out of recycling electronic trash. Products such as cell phones, televisions, microwave ovens, computer monitors, and other small gadgets and devices can mean big money when stripped down to their essential components. The National Center for Electronics Recycling (NCER) did a study in 2006 and determined that a national recycling program would be quite cost effective and produce billions of dollars.

It was suggested that it be run as follows: a national coordinator and administrative system which would oversee financing, reporting, and enforcement; one set of national program requirements; the used electronics would become an interstate commodity; there would be some oversight by states (Patchwork 2. 4).

Almost 5 1/2 billion dollars was spent in 2005 dealing with solid waste pollution from landfills. In many areas, although not all, this waste came either directly or in directly from water treatment facilities. Known as pollution abatement, there were also 20, 000 facilities in the private manufacturing sector that had to pay privately for solid waste pollution

abatement. Utility companies were not did the study (U. S. Manufacturing 1. 5).

The American dream is owning one's own home. A home is one's castle. It is the biggest investment one will make in one's lifetime. It is often the biggest source of one's pride and joy, after children. Imagine having all of this, the perfect American dream, and then a landfill opens up within sight of your backyard. What happens then? America is also the land of NIMBY – Not in My Back Yard. Landfills are needed; just no one wants to live near one. There are benefits. Little or no property taxes since the company running the landfill usually pay for these for a certain perimeter surrounding the landfill, and they pay well. It is a well-funded school district, meaning those children receive the best money can buy. There are usually community centers, parks, pools, and other beautiful incentives paid for that last for a generation or two. With all of these positives, what are the negatives? Why would people not want all of these financial incentives?

Imagine you are a potential home buyer you are hearing to homes of similar size and finishes. The lot sizes and the landscaping are also pretty comparable to each other. There seems district. One houses a half mile away from the landfill and can be seen in the distance when standing in the back of the house. The other house is several miles away in the land fill cannot be seen from the house or anywhere on the property. If the houses are priced the same, which would you choose? It has been proven, time and time again, various and studies the people who have homes nearly and fill also have lower property values. The closer the homes are to landfill, the more the property values fall.

One reason that properties closer to a land fill have lower property values is the fear of a containment breach, concerns over odors or other toxins entering the air or water supply, or just find the unusual mound grass awkward or unattractive. While the landfill is operational residents living near it also have to deal with the noise of the day-to-day operations and the truck traffic associated with operating the landfill. It has been statistically proven that relatively people properties about 5 miles away from the landfill are worth about 11% more than those in the neighborhood of the landfill after the landfill no longer operates (Kinnaman 380). Outside of the five-mile perimeter of the landfill, property values increase to the regional range, which is usually about 85% higher than those closest to landfill (Kinnaman 385). When the landfill in Tullytown, Pennsylvania, closes in the next decade is anticipated there will be another widespread study done on property values in the area. Tullytown is an affluent area of Bucks County, which is in the northern Philadelphia suburbs. A widespread study such as this needed to justify whether or not people are comfortable with landfills being built, maintained, and are comfortable once it closes and is close to a residential area. Tullytown was constructed after the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, which is the act which forced landfills to be constructed with high standards during the construction and operation processes. When Tullytown closes, there are strict guidelines which must also be followed at that time. When these spring standards were put in place, the costs of building and maintaining landfills increased significantly. Therefore, far fewer landfills were built. The ones that were constructed were much larger, have the capacity many times over of previous landfills, and

were set to be operational for decades longer. They also serve many regions and, in some cases, multiple states (Kinnaman 388).

Since the United States uses landfills as a means of permanent disposal of about 60% of its solid waste, and citizens in the United States produce more trash than people in any other country in the world, landfills and trash are big business in this country. According to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in 2004 it costs between \$3.05 and \$4.39 to dispose of each compacted ton of trash. That may not seem like a lot, but multiply one household's trash at the number of people in the community by 52 weeks a year in each house produces a significant amount of trash.

Government regulations keep the cost of operating a landfill high, but these guidelines are in place to protect the public that live in the region surrounding landfill to ensure their health and safety. Everybody should pay more for their trash removal to ensure quality of life of the relatively few people who do live with landfills right in their backyards (Kinnaman 380).

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