

Problem Statement

County Role in Solid Waste Management

Minnesota Statute 473.803 requires metropolitan counties to plan and implement activities to meet the State's policy for solid waste management. Overall, local governments are responsible for ensuring that solid waste generated in their jurisdictions is managed in an environmentally and economically sound manner that protects public health and safety. Solid waste management is strongly grounded in the need to safeguard the environment, conserve and recover material and energy resources, and protect public health and safety. Thus, counties are accountable to the public they serve to successfully plan and implement activities to meet the state policy and the corresponding goals established in the solid waste management plans.

Ramsey and Washington Counties embrace this vision, accept their role, and desire to step forward in a responsible manner. The Counties' vision includes working very closely with private service providers in "Public/Private Partnerships" to undertake activities designed to implement state policy.

Both Counties have adopted Regional/County Solid Waste Management Master Plans, which were prepared jointly with other metropolitan counties and have been approved by the State of Minnesota. These plans establish outcomes, policies, and strategies to meet goals established in the State's Regional Solid Waste Policy Plan.

Vision and Goals

The Counties' Solid Waste Management Plans (Plans) are founded in a regional vision for a sustainable community that seeks to minimize waste, prevent pollution, promote efficiency, and provide a sustainable infrastructure for solid waste management. These goals seek to protect the environment, public health, and safety. The goals are aimed at conserving energy and resources. A key goal is to protect the state's land, air, water, other natural resources, and the public health through an integrated system, in which waste is managed using a variety of technologies. The State has a hierarchy of preferred waste management methods, which is important to attain the objectives of sustainability and appropriate solid waste management.

There are five goals inherent in the vision of sustainability that provides the basis for the desired results from activities in the Solid Waste Management Plan. These include:

- Manage wastes to protect the environment and public health, and to conserve resources;
- Manage wastes using a variety of methods according to the State's hierarchy, in order to minimize landfilling;
- Manage wastes cost-effectively and minimize potential liability for citizens, businesses, and taxpayers;
- Encourage waste generator responsibility for environmentally sound waste management; and
- Allocate costs fairly to users.

The Plans for each county have specific outcomes and strategies related to each level of the solid waste hierarchy, including:

- Source reduction;
- Toxicity reduction;
- Recycling;
- Resource recovery and composting; and
- Landfilling.

Problems

Simply stated, the reason for this analysis is that the current system of solid waste collection and management is not moving the Counties toward the long-term goals. Ramsey and Washington Counties are evaluating Public Collection to determine whether expanding public contracting for collection service can help meet the goals of their respective Solid Waste Management Plans.

During this study, the Counties have identified several specific problems and concerns with the current solid waste management system:

- **Waste generation is increasing rapidly**—the amount of solid waste generated each year has been increasing much faster than population growth. In Ramsey and Washington Counties, the waste stream has grown over 18% from 1996 through 2000 versus a population growth of 5% over the same time period, and employment growth of 10%. A lot of waste growth can be attributed to the hot economy of the late 1990's; nonetheless this rate of waste growth is in conflict with goals for source reduction.

See Appendix 2, Problem Statements, Source Reduction, for more detailed information on this issue.

- **Recycling is stagnant or decreasing, as economic incentives to recycle have diminished.** While there is considerable recycling, it has leveled off and is not keeping pace with the growth in the waste stream. Diminished economic incentives have resulted from significantly lower tipping fees combined with lower material market prices.

See Appendix 2, Problem Statements, Recycling for more information about this issue.

- **Resources that could be put to a higher use are disposed in processing facilities or landfills.** Waste composition studies show that almost half (45%) of the material collected as mixed municipal solid waste could be recycled, and about 70% could be used in organics composting facilities.

See Appendix 2, Problem Statements, Resource Conservation for more information about this issue.

- **Key decisions are made with a focus on short-term cost or profits.** Decisions based on short-term costs or profits are not balanced with longer-term costs and benefits for conserving resources and minimizing the generator's potential future liability.

See Appendix 2 for a discussion about industry consolidation and market issues.

- **Illegal dumping of wastes and associated environmental concerns continues in several areas.** Public officials in St. Paul and Ramsey County, as well as several cities in Washington County, note illegal dumping is currently a significant problem.

See Appendix 2 for more information about this issue.

- **Municipal concerns on truck traffic continue.** Several municipal officials raise questions regarding the potential impacts of garbage truck traffic such as safety, excess road wear, and aesthetics (noise and dust).

See Appendix 2 for more information about this issue.

- **Resource recovery costs are subsidized to compete with landfilling costs.** The subsidies are raised on county property tax statements and state taxes on solid waste. Property tax service charges are not tied closely to waste generation. Therefore costs for resource recovery are not allocated fairly to users based on the quantity of waste they generate.
- **Resource Recovery capacity is not consistently utilized.** For the past several years, significant quantities of wastes that could be recovered to

produce energy have been landfilled. In 2002, waste deliveries to resource recovery are projected to be in excess of capacity—a very significant change in waste quantities that currently will only last one year. There has been no ability to plan for efficient management of capacity. In addition:

- Resources are being disposed in landfills;
- Waste stream growth is being managed at the low end of the hierarchy; and
- Increased landfilling creates the potential for long-term clean up needs.