

Solid Waste ~~Field~~ Audits
Commercial

Development of Commercial Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling Plans

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by

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Thesis

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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Garbage disposal in the United States has evolved from simply being an unpleasant part of everyday life to a tremendous societal challenge. Solid waste disposal resources are becoming more and more scarce, while the American solid waste generation rate is increasing. The waste disposal challenge is fueled by crisis situations that become worse each day in many parts of the country, including Rhode Island. The task of garbage disposal cannot be left to any one group, but is a part of every individual's life. Consequently, the field of waste management has grown into a complex mesh of public and private involvement.

Waste management techniques of the past were sufficient to satisfy the needs of previous societies but are no longer effective for contemporary society. Management practices and our values inherited from societies past have created the situation in Rhode Island: a critical lack of disposal capacity for the quantity of waste that is being generated.

Garbage has always been a side effect of an active society. Growth, expansion, and development have steadily increased the demand for garbage disposal throughout history. The ways of accomplishing this most necessary task have grown, expanded, and developed into the complex field of waste management. The composition of society's waste stream has changed from primarily those materials

commonly found in nature to a diverse mix of new man-made materials which create specific disposal challenges.

The methods for dealing with waste disposal, however, have not changed dramatically through history. For example, in medieval times, common waste disposal practices included burning, burying, and throwing trash out the window and into the street for wandering livestock to pick through. Currently, the three waste disposal methods in wide-spread use are landfilling, incineration, and littering. Essentially, the means of removing waste from its point of generation have remained the same although they are now more capital intensive and technologically complex.

There has, however, been the beginning of a new era in solid waste management. Within the last few years, widespread solid waste reduction and recycling efforts have been proposed and have begun to be implemented in assorted types of volunteer and mandatory programs.

The concept of waste reduction is relatively new to our society and will require further development to become an accepted part of waste management systems. Recycling has been used intermittently in the past as a solid waste disposal method. This waste management method was practiced in times of societal or economic stress, and was abandoned after the immediate crisis passed and the normal availability of resources and the supply of consumer goods returned. The current crisis that is encouraging recycling is not a war or economic depression, but is a waste disposal crisis.

Recycling efforts on a small scale became popular in the 1960s and 1970s during the general awakening of environmental awareness in this country. Recycling was recognized as a method of resource recovery and prevented the needless landfilling or incineration of valuable materials. Recycling was attempted at many different levels including the community, and club, and also as money making ventures. Most of these programs disappeared over time due to loss of enthusiasm, or market fluctuations. Although many of these programs have ended, the idea of recycling as a minor, unessential part of the waste disposal process lingers on today.

Currently, the reduction and recycling of solid waste is seen as a viable and necessary waste management option, not just an alternative technique. In Rhode Island commercial solid waste generators are one very significant group that will be integrating the use of reduction and recycling techniques into their solid waste management programs. As required by Rhode Island General Law 23-18-8, commonly called the Flow Control Law, all commercial solid waste generators in the state are required to implement reduction and recycling programs into their waste management systems. Since commercial solid waste represents roughly half of the state waste stream, there is significant opportunity for lessening Rhode Island's waste crisis through effective commercial waste reduction and recycling.

This thesis will examine the process of implementing commercial solid waste reduction and recycling in Rhode Island. I seek to satisfy two purposes in this thesis: (1) to encourage an updated approach to commercial solid waste management, and (2) to demonstrate one method to implement commercial solid waste reduction and recycling programs to comply with Rhode Island's regulatory requirements. This

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