

Alaskans must face garbage crisis

OPINION

by Rep. Fran Ulmer
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JUNEAU — We are in the midst of a garbage crisis in Alaska.

- In Juneau, where residents pay the highest refuse rates in Alaska, the local landfill is nearly full and it's estimated to cost \$3 million to build a new incinerator.

- Fairbanks has the same problem and will need \$23 million for a new landfill, although no long-term solid waste and waste reduction planning has been completed.

- In Kotzebue, the city dump operates without a permit and is located, in trespass, on state land. An estimated \$5.55 million will be requested over the next few years without a solid waste plan in place.

- In Cordova, the landfill is poorly maintained and wind-blown trash often spreads across nearby mudflats.

- In a few months, all coastal communities will be forced to accept refuse from floating processors, cruise ships and other vessels that dock in their communities when new federal regulations are adopted which prohibit ocean dumping.

Last session, the House adopted recycling and solid waste management as a top priority. Several of my colleagues and I introduced the WRRAP Act — the Waste Reduction, Recycling and Planning Act.

I am pleased to report that four pieces of legislation relating to recycling and waste reduction passed this year, all of which can have a positive impact on residents of Alaska.

HB 478, which I sponsored, provides grants of up to \$50,000 for solid waste management planning and technical assistance so that communities will have the ability to explore waste reduction, recycling and other options when planning for their solid waste needs for the future.

The Department of Environmental Conservation will also be expanding its efforts in these areas, and will be offering additional assistance to communities wrestling with solid waste problems.

By passage of this bill, the state goes "on record" favoring waste reduction and recycling. It also ensures that communities and industrial solid waste facility operators begin to focus on waste reduction and recycling by requiring that these options be considered as part of the permitting process.

HB 480, sponsored by Rep. Mark Boyer, D-Fairbanks, expands the Alaska Clean Water Fund and allows it to be used to build new facilities, make improvements to existing facilities or buy equipment for the purpose of waste reduction, recycling, treatment or disposal.

In making loans from the fund, the Department of Environmental Conservation will give priority to projects that will alleviate severe health or environmental concerns, and they may consider the extent of local or regional support for the proposed facility before allowing the fund to be tapped.

HB 481, sponsored by Rep. David Finkelstein, D-Anchorage, requires the state to begin using recycled paper, to buy recycled goods and to cut down on the amount of paper being used by requiring that both sides be used for printing.

By 1994, 25 percent of all paper purchased by state government will have to be recycled, and those vendors selling recyclable goods will receive a 5 percent recycled products bidding preference.

In addition, a Waste Reduction and Recycling Task Force was established, so that all agencies of state government can work together toward a common goal — creating less waste and recycling all they can.

In addition, HB 532, sponsored by Rep. Virginia Collins, R-Anchorage, requires the placement of coding on all plastic bottles which are sold in the state.

By coding plastics by the type of resin used to make them, the container can be more easily sorted and recycled more efficiently. This speeds the recycling process, thus saving the recycler time and money.

Passage of this legislation underscores the fact that positive things are beginning to happen in Alaska. Many people are becoming more aware of the waste problem and are doing all they can personally to recycle and reduce the garbage they throw out each day.

Anchorage has a state-of-the-art recycling center.

Petersburg, Wrangell and Ketchikan are working together with other communities on Prince of Wales Island to

see whether a regional approach may be the best solution for the solid waste problem in that area.

In Juneau, a new recycling business will be opening soon, and the city has included funding in the budget for a recycling coordinator, a new solid waste plan and a small recycling pilot project.

The citizens of Alaska are saying

that the time has come for us to find solutions to the problems created by our refuse. From Nome to Fairbanks, from Sitka to Kenai, recycling efforts have been started.

The legislation adopted this year and efforts undertaken in each community are moving us toward a day when recycling and waste reduction will be a way of life for all of us.