

Elements 99 Edcom

The Elements '99 issue, similar to its predecessors, is intended to provide a bird's-eye view of issues, challenges, and opportunities facing the waste industry as a whole and especially municipal waste managers in this, the last year of the millenium. The issue is broken down by functional areas--administration/management, collection, recycling, processing, and disposal--leaving me the task of tying the sections together in a sort of overview, beginning with a catalog of leading events of the past year and proceeding to a glimpse of what these and other issues hold in store for us in the future.

What 1999 Will Remember of 1998?

Consolidation. Proving itself to be no flash-in-the-pan, consolidation in the private waste-provider sector continued to gather momentum throughout the year, leaving us with fewer titans (see Table 1), and far fewer local waste companies. To date, the impacts felt throughout the nation, the industry, and particularly the people directly involved--sellers, buyers, corporate officers and managers, and shareholders--have been resoundingly positive. In spite of a few upsets and dislocations here and there, today's radar screen is remarkably clear of bogies, leading one to question the validity of concerns many (including us) have raised since the consolidation trend began in earnest. We'll discuss some of these in the next section.

Collection. At SWANA's 1998 WasteCon in Charlotte, NC this past October, several companies with collection-related products--vehicles, carts, weighing, and data management--got together to demonstrate the various elements of automated collection. Interesting as the equipment and demonstrations were, to me the most notable feature of the exercise was the employment of a systems approach to the activity. Yes, this may have been "for demonstration purposes only," but with all the attention routinely paid to the pieces that go to make up a collection system, here was a clear attempt by industry members to lay out a cohesive picture of how all the pieces fit together...recognition on the part of producers of the need to provide customers with systems-oriented answers to their collection challenges.

Waste Management Strategies. Will the waste management hierarchy as we've known it survive the turn of the century? After completion of two separate studies conducted during 1999, the answer would seem to be a pretty resounding "yes," only with greatly increase understandings of the costs and benefits involved. EPA's life-cycle cost analysis studies, which have been

II Recycling

Who Speaks for Recycling? Once the darling of environmentalists, recycling programs fell on hard times during the recent recession, finding fewer and fewer champions today, particularly in the private sector where the rush to bolster balance sheets favors meat-and-potato programs. But has the public given up? We think not, so here's both challenge and opportunity for MSW managers.

III Transformation Technologies

What are they and where do they stand?

- A. Systems -- WTE, Composting, LFGTE, Pyrolyzing
- B. Perspectives: Europe and US
- C. Commercialization -- possibilities for bridging the gulf

IV Information Systems and Automation

How far have we come and where are we going?

- A. Management and Administration
- B. Collection and Handling
- C. Processing, Diversion, and Disposal

V Landfill Issues

Bioreactors versus Cold Storage

- A. The issues
- B. The technogies
- C. The economics
- D. Challenges and opportunities

Estimate of the public sector -- inventory and forecast of needs.

Justice department and consolidation

EPA -Who are they working for

Consolidation

[Were these concerns unfounded or do they still lurk just over the horizon awaiting the time and place to strike? Time will tell, of course, but I think it is important for us to review them, if for no other reason than to maintain a proper vigilance.

First and foremost is the threat of removal of competition from the scene, both through outright purchase of rivals, and the manipulation of the marketplace (artificial lowering of pricing to win contracts is one such tactic that comes to mind). In any competitive situation, the

The Challenge of Consolidation: What is it? What does it impact or threaten? What are its driving forces? [Kate to write overview and segues.]

- A. Historical perspective, attraction, economic features [Kate -- 500 words]
 - 1. What's the attraction? [Michael Hoffman, Credit Suisse, First Boston - 212-325-2000]
- B. Vertical integration as a road to monopoly and control of resources [John -- 500 words]
- C. Threats to the public interest in such areas as health and safety, ISWM, competition, environment, technological advancement, quality of life [Kate 1000 words]
 - 1. What Happens when it Happens to you [a swm who has be overwhelmed by vertically integrated private sw company]

The Public Sector -- how to go about protecting the public interest; meeting legal and regulatory requirements; developing, using, and expanding resources; and getting the best deal. [Kate 500 words]

- A. Inventory of assets -- Human resources, facilities and equipment, fiscal and political considerations. [Here's where I'd like to make use of Eugene Tseng in coming up with an elegant way of appraising these aspects]
 - 1. Dealing with Privatization Pressures [Joe Delaney]
 - 2. Contracting to prevent vertical integration takeover [Constance Hornig]
 - 3. Strategies -- (1) turn over to private industry, (2) marketplace participation through managed competition, (3) prescriptive measures to achieve dominance in local markets. [Kate 500 words]
 - 1. Maintaining Competition in a fully privatized environment [someone from private sector]
 - 2. Becoming a Market Participant through managed competition [Kathi Mestayer/Wayman Pearson]
 - 3. Playing Hardball -- Public Sector all the way [Jim Warner -- Lancaster SW Authority]

Competing with privates for other municipal