

In the old days, when you went to the local “dump”, you threw everything into a pile that was eventually burned in the open. The ash and residue was bulldozed and the cycle repeated. For most towns, the operational budget was the lowest item for the community and required very little oversight. How times have changed! The solid waste budget in most communities is increasingly becoming very expensive and complicated.

Background: In 1976, the State of NH banned open burning. We (through you, the town meeting voters) chose to setup a refuse district comprised of the Towns of Hebron and Bridgewater. Hebron closed its existing dump, and the new district purchased the current land in Bridgewater, constructed a building, and installed its first incinerator coupled with an ash and C&D landfill. Over time, as new state and federal regulations were promulgated; solid waste cost became more expensive. For us, the costs during the period 1976-2000 were relatively flat. In 2000, the State insisted that we bring all the programs up to new standards. As we were already committed to a large bond issue with the BHVD school as well as new state property tax (donor town!), we agreed to resolving the issues by 2004.

From 2000 – 2003, we researched the matter and sought varied opinions from the Department of Environmental Services (DES), various experts and community members. We came to the same conclusions that were reached in 1976. Recycling, reuse, incineration and, lastly, land filling. (This parallels DES priorities as put forth by the legislature) From 2000-2004 we built recycling infrastructure. In 2004, after public hearings, we bonded funding to remove the old incinerator, renovate the building, close the pre-1981 dump site, close the C&D landfill, install monitoring wells, and build a new incinerator with state of the art emission controls. This is a small sample of the solid waste upgrades done during that period. Currently, we are working on new reporting systems and new licenses for solid waste, recycling and upgraded emissions systems.

At the time, and in various town reports, newsletters and hearings, we indicated that this path would be time consuming and more expensive in the first 10 years than alternative methods. In the longer run, this should be less expensive and have greater control of the municipal waste process. In a recent article from a neighboring town, they expect their solid waste cost to double by 2010. We expect our costs to go down by 40% - 50% by 2014. One item that complicates this matter is the increase in the amount of municipal solid waste that is being brought to the facility. In 2000 we estimated that we processed 400,000 pounds of waste. Currently, we process almost 1.6 million pounds of waste. 55% of our current budget is capital cost. Municipal solid waste costs are on the rise in NH and the US.

There are very few landfills left in NH. No community wants to site a new landfill. (NIMBY) (Not In My Back Yard). Existing landfill space is in decline. Landfills across the US are also in sharp decline and states are imposing fees to discourage trash importing. Three existing landfills in Mass. were recently closed and, according to DES, most of that material is coming into this state exacerbating this problem. In addition, there are a number of bills in the legislature establishing a moratorium on the creation of new landfills. You cannot simply ship your waste problems away from your community.

At present, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moved the date for new air standards back from 2014 to 2010. We just activated an additional emission monitor to determine how difficult it will be to meet the new standard. (We had already installed most of this system during the initial design phase) For example, SO₂ levels are to be reduced from 141 parts per million (ppm) to 3 ppm. Our current operation emits about 1 ppm! Our mercury levels are almost non-existent. With a little luck, we can meet the enhanced standards with little or no major changes to the systems. We currently recycle about 70% of the waste stream; incinerate about 19%. We offsite landfill the remainder (ash, some C&D, etc). We are currently evaluating new approaches to reduce what is sent to those offsite landfills.

Most towns don't want the hassle nor invest in capital infrastructure as it's not politically popular given current economic conditions. They simply want to toss the trash into a dumpster and let someone else deal with the issue. In our opinion, that has always been "penny wise and pound foolish" The annual meeting for the H-B Refuse is in December. Check the papers and bulletin boards for date and time.