

Michigan Recycling Coalition  
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1-14-08 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes  
10:00 AM to 11:40 PM

**Present:**

Cara Clore, Clinton County  
Phil Mikus, Granger  
Mike Csapo, RRRASOC  
Don Pyle, DCSWMA  
Steve Chalker, City of Lansing

**Recycling “Refresher”**

The Committee conducted a final review of the six-page document to be disseminated to elected officials in late January. A cover letter to accompany the document urges law maker’s action on existing solid waste and recycling legislation.

**Advocacy & Lobbying**

A booklet titled “Non-profit Advocacy: A Michigan Primer” was discussed. Produced by the Michigan Non-Profit Association, the booklet provides guidelines on non-profit advocacy and lobbying activities. It would seem the MRC has the ability to conduct a much broader array of both advocacy and lobbying activities while still maintaining its 501©3 status. The benchmark which MRC must be mindful of, in terms of violating its non-profit status according to IRS and federal guidelines for 501©3 organizations, is that no more than 25% of total revenues can be received from lobbying activities. The need to increase MRC’s participation in both lobbying and advocacy was discussed. Pages #10 - #13 of the handbook provide useful information for review for our February, as the committee discusses the development of an advocacy plan for the organization.

**Resolution to oppose measures to increase organic waste in Michigan Landfills**

*Brought forth by Mike Csapo, RRRASOC*

See Attachment 1 for a copy of the draft resolution. The resolution was drafted in response to Senate Bill 0864 which seeks an exemption to Michigan’s yard waste ban in an effort to increase the rate of landfill gas and subsequently electricity generation at Michigan landfills. While Mike sees the benefit in being able to lobby for or against a specific bill, he likes the general nature of the proposed resolution; it addresses the broader issues associated with landfilling organics and could be useful in responding to future legislation pertaining to related bills.

Mike provided an overview of the proposed resolution. He stated the resolution was developed from a position taken by RRRASOC’s board of directors in recent months. He stated strong concerns regarding SB 0864. He feels that advocates of the bill have been misleading with regard to data on how much energy can be potentially generated if yard waste were reintroduced to the state’s landfills. Based on EPA data, if all landfills were to collect landfill gas it would only meet between .5% and .81% of the nation’s energy needs. Furthermore the policy report commissioned by Granger and prepared

by Public Sector Consultants indicates that overall energy production could increase by 41% over current levels if yard waste were added. However significant that increase may seem, however it is still very much insignificant, less than 2%, of the total national need.

Mike further expressed concerns about the consequences that would result from the marginal increase in energy production should the exemption to the ban pass. According to the Local Institute for Self Reliance, composting creates 4 jobs compared to just one job created by landfilling waste. Therefore one can infer that as composting facilities were to close, job losses would occur. Additionally, there is also some question as to whether or not the exemption to the ban would result in an immediate increase in methane released into the atmosphere. This is due to the fact that organic waste breaks down quickly – in as little as two weeks from the time it is placed into a landfill – during this time there is no cap on the material, just the alternate daily cover. The efficiency rate – that is the amount of methane captured by landfill gas collection systems – can be as low as 25%, and as high as 75% under the best collection technology. As a result it seems a very poor trade off again considering how little energy will be generated. There is also concern on what the impact of the exemption would have on Michigan's composting industry. While Granger has made the case that in the 20 years since the yard waste ban the composting industry hasn't been successful in marketing materials. However when looking at best practices and what's going on in North America and across the globe the trends is to remove organics and only employ landfill for inert materials. To do otherwise is to go in the wrong direction, and would put Michigan at a competitive disadvantage. If we don't take advantage of the current opportunities for managing organics, where will we be in 15 years? Mike stated the resolution he drafted is in direct congruence with MRC's mission and other stated policy resolutions.

Phil Mikus provided a statement in opposition to the resolution, see attachment two.

Cara commented that without question there must be benefits related to an increase in alternative energy production, and the resultant reduction in GHG associated with less dependence on traditional (coal) electricity generation. However the unintended consequences (of reintroducing yard waste selectively into landfills) are unclear and could easily overshadow any benefits gained from the increased energy production. While she personally does not support diverting organics to landfills to increase methane production, Clinton County has not taken a position on this issue; as a result she will abstain from voting on the proposed resolution. She also commented that the concern of alienating members should the MRC begin to take controversial positions on bills or policy resolutions is a possibility. As such the committee and board should be mindful of members' reactions. While some will welcome this approach others may not; as a "peace maker" it would be great if we could find a scenario where everyone could win.

Don agrees with Cara in that he would prefer to try to find a compromise on controversial issues. Don felt the information presented by Mike is appropriate, and agrees that the best way to handle organics is through composting; however he also feels that people in other areas that can extract energy from landfill operations, should be able to do so and be allowed flexibility in how they operate their system. Don

suggested that the resolution be amended to include statements which suggest that composting is a best practice approach to managing organics, but that the MRC does allow for other options if a facility can demonstrate they are doing a good job and that an alternate approach can be effective i.e. there are situations where an exemption to the yard waste ban can be useful.

Steve said it makes sense to allow flexibility with regard to how folks operate, but he can't overlook the fact that landfills are the number one source of methane generation. He states "There is no methane in solid waste, it's only once you put it in a landfill that it becomes a problem; so it seems like it makes the most sense to avoid generating it in the first place." He felt the MRC should be supporting composting as the primary management option for organics. To do anything else other than advocate against bills such as SB 0864 is inconsistent with the MRC's mission statement and purpose. The resolution put forth by Mike is good environmental policy, to not support it as is "to turn our backs on the whole of our membership and say we aren't really sure if we support landfill diversion."

Vanessa commented that from her perspective and in talking to various legislative aides, it does not appear that SB 0864 is a priority for the Senate Committee for Energy Policy and Public Utilities. She felt that the bill brings benefits to different areas of the state, and as a result it would take an overhaul in various areas of the legislation for it to be taken up in committee. She also suggested that in instances like these, when a bill is so clearly subjective (the benefits of the bill are relative to those in different geographic locations) it often decreases the likelihood of it being moved forward.

Cara stated that it seems like all landfills should be required to capture methane to generate electricity or use as natural gas. Don mentioned that the federal government determines by volume (or cubic foot of gas produced per minute) who has the option of flaring vs. simply releasing landfill gas into the environment. Don said he wished his facility produced enough gas to justify the investment in generators to produce electricity, but he simply does not. Steve recalled reading a study which suggested that some flare technology is actually more effective at reducing methane emissions than internal combustion engines used to generate electricity.

Mike requested to make a few comments regarding the position paper Phil read. He expressed the fact that the letter acknowledged that landfills are the single largest source of methane and wonders "how do you go from that position to suggest that we add more organics which will increase methane generation?" Mike stated that even if we go with the best case scenario with regard to collection efficiency, we are still emitting a large amount of methane into the environment. All landfills should be collecting, but it doesn't follow that we should be increasing methane generation to increase electricity generation. It's not about increasing methane, but about how do we be as efficient as possible with the amount of methane that is generated. Mike further went on to express concern over the continued assertion that an exemption to the yard waste ban to allow organics for methane generation would result in a significant amount of energy created. Mike feels this is disingenuous since an increase of upwards of 1% to at best 2% of the nation's total energy needs can not be deemed significant.

Mike went on to discuss the fact that landfills stand to gain financially if the yard waste ban were lifted. If one were to compare the value of yard waste going to compost facilities vs. that same amount going into landfills, and that comparison were used to justify the investment in the necessary technology to capture and generate methane, the value of the tipping fees alone well exceeds the cost of the technology at a rate of 15% of discounted cash value of the tip fees, according to Mike's estimation. In Mike's opinion this is the clear driver behind SB 0864 is to provide a source of revenue with which a landfill can make money. It represents a transfer of income from a job creating industry that is good for the environment to another industry that isn't as good for the environment. Mike expressed concerns that this is a win-win for landfill owners, and that those in the industry that say it is better for the environment are being misleading.

Recognizing that the resolution would not have the required 2/3 committee support to pass, Cara questioned if it was the right time to call the vote. Mike commented that it's healthy for the MRC to have this discussion, and he didn't anticipate the resolution would pass. He requested the Committee vote and then communicates back to the membership. The discussion to follow an earlier recommendation by Cara to present the issue before the membership in a survey was also discussed and will be pursued by staff.

Cara Clore asked to entertain a motion in support of the resolution presented by Mike Csapo to oppose measures to increase organic waste in Michigan Landfills. Mike Csapo moved, with support from Steve Chalker. Ayes: Mike Csapo, Steve Chalker. Nays: Phil Mikus, Don Pyle. Abstain: Cara Clore

### **Membership Survey**

The survey drafted last October will go out to membership the week of January 21<sup>st</sup>. Staff will conduct phone call follow up to encourage member participation the first full week of February.

### **Survey Tool**

It was suggested at the November membership meeting that MRC facilitate a survey tool to be used to gain member input on legislative and policy issues. Mike suggested that along with the questions, a background piece that provides an overview of the pros and cons be developed as an introduction – this would be limited to two to three paragraphs each. All agreed SB 0864 and the issue of diverting organics from landfills was a good first issue to pilot the survey tool. Mike volunteered to prepare two or three paragraphs in support of organics diversion and Cara will ask Granger to prepare a statement in support of allowing organics in landfills.

Potential Questions:

1. include zip code to be able to break down by congressional districts
2. include personal identifier such as member number or name or email address
3. Do you support or not support the issue?
4. On what basis do you support or not support or what are the top three reasons why you support or do not support?
5. Do you believe the MRC should take an advocacy role in supporting your position?
6. Would you advise your local officials to vote in support or opposition of SB 0864?