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## Winnemucca residents trash proposal for accepting California garbage

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To Winnemucca's Tami Vetter, the staggering numbers for the Jungo Road landfill are a recipe for a health disaster: 4,000 tons of garbage, hauled five days a week into Humboldt County from Northern California for the next 95 years.

"There is no amount of money that makes it worth taking all that garbage," Vetter said. "The more I think of that amount of garbage, the more terrified I get. What we are going to have is a poisonous soup. We are setting ourselves up for health problems."

But San Francisco-based Recology has received a permit from the Humboldt County Planning Commission that allows it to take steps to secure the necessary state permits before opening a dump on the desert playa outside of Winnemucca.

Some local officials say if Recology obtains permits from the state Division of Environmental Protection, then the landfill will happen regardless of the opposition.

Others disagree, noting the Humboldt County Commission ultimately must negotiate a host fee and could place restrictions on the landfill.

Recology intends to collect household garbage from San Francisco and about 50 other communities in Northern California and haul it over 300 miles of Union Pacific track to a mile-square landfill 28 miles west of Winnemucca.

For accepting Bay Area trash, Humboldt County might receive \$1 million a year and gain about 25 jobs for workers at the dump.

The idea of putting San Francisco trash in Humboldt County has divided Winnemucca, a town of 7,700 off Interstate 80, 450 miles north of Las Vegas.

Vetter and other residents have formed Nevadans Against Garbage and have begun circulating petitions against the landfill. She maintains the vast majority of local residents oppose the dump.

They have compiled an extensive amount of information about Recology and the landfill siting process and placed it on a Web site.

"One of the things I have learned about Recology is they go for putting landfills in rural communities and usually get their way," Vetter said. "We have trusted our county officials to look out for us, and they haven't."

Adam Alberti, a spokesman for Recology, said his employee-owned company is an above-board, environmentally friendly firm with an 89-year history of operating safe landfills.

"We don't want to jam it down their throats," Alberti said. "It will not pose any health risks. We are dealing with household waste. We are working to build trust in the community."

The company already operates one Nevada dump, the small Crestline landfill for residents in Lincoln County.

But asbestos and tires could be put in the Jungo Road landfill, and that scares people like Vetter.

"What happens to a landfill like this when the liner under it eventually leaks?" she asked. "All liners leak and that poisonous soup leaks into the water table."

The water table at the proposed landfill site is only 60 feet below the desert surface.

Recology will place one or two liners to serve as barriers to protect groundwater under the landfill, according to Alberti.

Asbestos will be wrapped in coating required by environmental regulations before it is buried in the dump.

"Asbestos can be handled safely," he said. "Like it or not, asbestos is in this world."

Until earlier this year, Recology was known as Norcal Waste Systems.

When it secured the Crestline permits more than a decade ago, Norcal's plan was to haul trash from the Los Angeles area to its Lincoln County landfill. That never has been done, but the permits remain in place.

Winnemucca Mayor Di An Putnam estimates a "sizeable minority" of the local population opposes the dump, but she concedes it is largely a "done deal" because of past actions by the City Council and Humboldt County Commission.

Before Recology arrived on the scene, the commission and council passed ordinances to allow a second landfill in the county, including on the land that Recology has an option to buy, according to Putnam.

"Winnemucca needs a new dump, and Recology will accept our trash," she said. "I don't think anything was hidden. A lot of people don't want to accept someone else's trash, but we do need a new dump."

The amount of trash that Winnemucca residents will put in the dump annually is equivalent to two or three days' worth of the Bay Area trash that will be moved to the site in a year, according to opponents.

Putnam concedes the amount of garbage frightens people, but the Jungo facility is considered a Class 1 dump, as is Winnemucca's current dump just outside town.

Eventually, a 200-foot-high mountain containing the trash will rise at the site.

County Commissioner Tom Fransway insists the dump is not a done deal and won't be until the commission negotiates the host fee and restrictions.

"I am on record as opposed to it," he said. "The other four commissioners are sitting on the fence. I don't see a benefit to taking 4,000 tons of garbage a day from California."

County Commissioner Garley Amos contends only a vocal minority oppose the landfill.

"A landfill is a permitted use" under county ordinances, Amos said. "We can put restrictions on it, but by law if they get the (environmental) permits we have to approve it. It gives us a chance to have a solid source of revenue for 100 years."

Amos maintains a \$1 million annual host fee and new jobs are tempting for the county.

He noted that Cyanco, a cyanide protection facility, is a few miles from the dump site and has not posed an environmental problem.

Cyanide is used to leach gold out of ore.

"There is nothing out there," Amos said. "A lot of people are going on emotions. There is an economic side to it, too."

Putnam agrees. She said residents were concerned 20 years ago that they all would die when the cyanide plant was constructed, and then nothing adverse happened.

Vetter said residents were caught off-guard by the planning commission's decision to give Recology the conditional use permit.

"They kept it quiet, and because of that the landfill is pretty much here," she said. "I feel like the people didn't have a voice. There are a lot of angry people here."

Fransway agrees. He said the planning commission did not give the matter the study it deserved.

According to Vetter, only in recent months have residents become aware of the mammoth amount of trash the company wants to dump as the state Division of Environmental Protection has conducted public hearings.

Jill Lufrano, a spokeswoman for the Division of Environmental Protection, said under the Interstate Commerce Clause of the Constitution, counties cannot flatly refuse to take waste from another state.

She pointed out that the Lockwood Landfill east of Reno accepts waste from South Lake Tahoe and Sacramento, Calif. Another landfill in West Wendover takes waste from Wendover, Utah, across the border.

Ed Glick, a compliance supervisor with the state agency, said the state has not yet given an air quality permit to Recology or begun hearings on a landfill permit.

"This is not a short process," he said. "We have to make sure the state is protected. Everything would be monitored."

But in its Aug. 23 edition, the Reno Gazette-Journal reported that the state agency somehow forgot about enforcing an order to close a pesticide dump in Antelope Valley, 50 miles south of Battle Mountain.

Rusting barrels of pesticides remain in the desert, although they were supposed to be removed by the federal government in 1993.

"A lot of our landfill regulations didn't exist before 1994," Glick said. "We adopted the federal regulations in 1994 and closed many landfills."

In light of Antelope Valley, Vetter doesn't have much faith in the state looking out for Winnemucca's interest.

"Are they really looking out for us, for our desert?" she said. "Are we so poor or greedy that we would stoop to the level of taking a risk for the sake of money?"

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