

Robert Ellis
Rapid City Public Works Director
300 Sixth Street
Rapid City SD 57701



June 30, 2009

Dear Robert,

Democracy in Action is a grassroots movement of women working to bring about progressive change in South Dakota and is committed to informing and energizing voters through education, outreach and action. We advocate responsible environmental stewardship and our Position Statement on the Environment “supports mandatory recycling by residential, commercial, industrial and government entities.”

We are encouraged by the recycling progress that Rapid City has made in the past decade and hold the RC Landfill and Jerry Wright’s efforts in high regard. We would like to add some thoughts to the discussion of the new Solid Waste Plan for Rapid City.

We are aware of the political implications of using the term “mandatory.” However, as Mr. Wright has pointed out at prior meetings, the citizenry accepted the mandate on yard waste recycling. If only one-third of RC households are currently recycling after years of efforts to make information and curbside recycling available, it is unlikely that the other two-thirds will get on board without a directive by our elected officials. Recycling is a habit, and without a directive, some will choose not to make it a habitual part of their lives.

Unfortunately but realistically, many people are guided not by what is “the right thing to do” but by their pocketbooks. Recycling saves money. Citizens of Rapid City who have city collection of garbage already pay for their recycling. In 2009, each household pays \$4.29 per month for recycling added on to their water bill (to be raised to \$4.44 in 2010.) Not everyone is aware of this. Since residents already pay for it, they should be participating. Were a more significant number of households to participate, this fee could be greatly reduced or even eliminated. Private haulers must be required to develop their own plan for hauling recyclables, which may well incur an additional expense to their customers.

At the rate our landfill is currently being impacted, it will reach its life expectancy in 2050. The amount of money required to locate, permit and construct a new landfill is extraordinary. This multi-million dollar project would be in addition to the cost required to close, reclaim, and monitor the old landfill.

We believe that mandatory recycling will ultimately be required of all residential and commercial customers; until then there is much that the City of Rapid City can do to set an example and promote reduce, reuse, recycle. Recycling bins must be available at all city offices, parks, and library, the Civic Center, on downtown city streets.

Further investigation into the following conservation and recycling efforts should be pursued:

1. Water fountains should be added to downtown street corners when construction projects are being planned thus helping to eliminate the use of individual plastic water bottles.
2. The use of biodegradable single-use beverage containers at large public events in city parks and the Civic Center.
3. Eliminate the use of free plastic bags in all grocery stores.
4. Develop a program to recycle more types of plastic.
5. Develop a plan to recycle magazines, junk mail, office paper and phone books with composting as a secondary alternative.
6. Develop a free hazardous waste drop-off site at the landfill where people can dispose of items typically thrown in the trash or dumped down the sewer. If a permanent site weren't feasible for reasons of cost and/or space, an alternative would be to set up a quarterly drop-off day.

Our Public Works Department has an excellent Solid Waste Operations page on rcgov.org with environmentally sound, thoughtfully presented information and presentations. How effective is this venue in getting out this information? Where else are these facts being presented?

We thank you for your efforts and for encouraging citizen input into the development of policy for our city's solid waste disposal.

Sincerely yours,

The Women of Democracy in Action

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