

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

With but two years' life left in Barnstable's Town Dump (according to statements attributed to informed officialdom), and with no indication a solution will be readily found, it sounds as though, by 1984, we'll all be knee-deep in refuse.

Will Barnstable residents return to the common practices of fifty years ago? In those days most Cape Codders chose an out-of-the-way spot on a corner of their property, usually hidden by underbrush or a clump of bushes, and dug a hole. Into the hole went household trash and garbage. When nearly full, the hole was topped off from the pile of sand alongside, and another dug. Nature took its course.

Paper products were often burned in a salvaged oil barrel perched next to the garbage hole; cooled ashes went on top of the trash.

That, of course, was Depression time in the 30s; few households had extra cash to pay monthly charges for trash collection. While the arrangement wasn't ideal and the hole out back wasn't attractive and added nothing to property values, it did eliminate refuse.

When a family wished to dispose of an item too large for the hole, something they couldn't sell or give away, they trucked it to the dump which often caught fire and burned. There was no landfill program. The stench of burning dump was familiar to people living down-wind.

If our dump is closed, will we return to such primitive procedures?

The options, once present dump-capacity is exhausted, are few. Perhaps Barnstable will see fit to finance a waste-disposal resource plant. That should be interesting, particularly in view of the monumental boondoggle the town has managed to become embroiled in with its sewage disposal plant which has already cost taxpayers more than \$16,000,000 and is still in court. And don't let yourselves be deceived that townspeople haven't paid that cost; just because some \$9,000,000 came from federal funds doesn't mean it didn't come from taxpayers originally.

The federal tax dollar is no less a burden than the local tax dollar. The principle difference between them is there are fewer palms to be greased, fewer politicians' pockets to be lined, and fewer administrative charges made on the local level.

Another option is the regional solution: all Cape towns joining in building, maintaining and operating a regional disposal plant. At first this seems to offer a logical solution, but since Barnstable's needs will emerge long before those of other towns, will the others participate? Is not the time already too short?

Then comes the question of locating such a facility. No town wants the plant inside its borders. Everyone's concerned about water pollution, and well they may be with but a single aquifer underlying our sandy peninsular and with the ever-present danger of water pollution from landfills.

Once we destroy our fresh water supply, the Cape will be almost uninhabitable. Closing dumps after that occurs won't help purify the water. As an attractive resort, the Cape will be finished. Business people with investments in income-earning property and who depend on future earnings to realize profits, do well to recognize the need to protect our water supply. Homeowners with many thousands invested in real estate must be equally concerned. Both stand to see enormous depreciation of property values if pure water ceases to be readily available here.

The only practical alternative to ground water, on Cape Cod, is the kind grocery stores sell in gallon jugs. Water costs us around one mil (1/10th of a cent) per gallon at present. Price it in the stores!

A third option, one we're warned will be prohibitively expensive, might be shipping our refuse off-Cape. News items indicate Rochester, MA., may be building a plant capable of accepting Cape Cod's trash. Even if costly, that might solve Barnstable's immediate problem. With population growth, however, shipping off-Cape is not a viable long-term plan. Sooner or later Rochester's plant will be too small to handle all we, and other surrounding areas, produce.

Might it not make better sense to reduce the quantity of trash we send to disposal areas? Might it not be rational to look ahead a few months and conduct ourselves in a responsible manner? Might it not even behoove us to spend money now to extend the life of the facility we have by paying to get rid of recyclable materials we are now loading into the dump?

Might it not be possible to require that trash be separated? It's argued that "people aren't ready" for that; people might not have been "ready" to replace outhouses with flush toilets, but building codes required them, and you don't see many outhouses any more. (Although we probably wouldn't have problems at the sewer plant if we did!)

If local ordinance forbids the collection of improperly separated trash, people would become "ready" quite rapidly. Separating recyclables and reducing the amount of materials entering the dump takes but a few seconds of time each day.

While it's easy to toss everything into a G.I. can in a jumble, there's little extra effort in flattening tins and keeping them in a separate box, rinsing glass containers and placing them in a second box, and slipping stacked newspapers and magazines into grocery bags for recycling. Perhaps if we were paying for recycling services instead of wailing because we make no profits, people would place a higher value on the process.

The complaint, now, is that recycling does not PAY; well, exhausting the capacity of the disposal area doesn't PAY, either.

And finding other ways to get rid of trash won't pay. It'll cost big money. And purchasing potable water in gallon jugs is not only expensive, but inconvenient.

Reducing the quantity of material deposited in our landfills is an achievable goal; it's remarkable how little accumulates if a few moments a day are devoted to reducing volume. A family of four can easily change from gathering three full cans, twice a week, to three cans twice a month.

To accomplish this, compost all vegetable scraps and garden waste; then spread the compost on either flower or vegetable gardens. Plants will flourish. Offer meat bones and scraps, including fat, to birds. They make short work of cleaning up a handout.

Toss flattened metal cans, plastics, and glass in separate containers. Slip magazines and newspapers into grocery bags and stack. All that remains is a bit of waste paper. Four 20-gallon cans, one for each type of refuse, emptied twice a month, are adequate for the average family. The stack of bagged newspapers occasionally may be taken for recycling. All it takes is planning.

Ours remains a wasteful society. We have made enormous progress recently in saving energy; for this we are to be commended although there's still room for improvement. There were those who said that couldn't be done; they were mistaken. When energy PRICES rose, people responded with alacrity. Energy conservation became the rule rather than the exception.

Faced with the same incentive in trash handling, people will respond to save money. This fact has been demonstrated clearly in the recent past. higher energy cost = reduced consumption. higher automobile price = fewer cars purchased. High interest rates = less money borrowed. A basic rule of economics, demonstrated.

Is it astonishing?