

village view

by Andrea Leonard

Whether you buy groceries at the supermarket or the corner store, you pay only for what you take away with you, item by item, pound by pound.

It would seem unreasonable -- none of us would stand for it -- if every customer were charged the same amount for her order, whether she left with ten fully-packed grocery bags or only a few items, say a loaf of bread and a pound of hamburger.

In recent years the Consumer Protection Agency has required unit pricing on all items displayed; even for items purchased in small quantities, like anti-perspirants and flavoring extracts, the price per pound is displayed to help consumers determine "best buys" among the bewildering assortments of sizes, weights and labels.

Although we buy the pound, however, we don't dispose of what's left by the pound: Rubbish, trash, garbage -- the residue of living we send to the dump -- is charged on the basis of volume. To obtain a "best buy" in trash disposal, it's necessary to generate a minimum of 60 gallons of rubbish.

Sixty gallons of rubbish is a lot of garbage.

It's equal to three full 20-gallon barrels, or three large plastic bags.

Probably many families generate that amount of trash each week, or even twice a week. On the other hand, there are hundreds of us in the Town of Barnstable, particularly families who recycle magazines, newspapers, aluminum and glass, and who compost kitchen, lawn and garden wastes, who send substantially less waste to the dump via garbage trucks. A family of one participating in the recycling program might easily have less than one full 20-gallon barrel of trash each week.

Nevertheless, the minimum charge is now \$78 a year for once-a-week pickup if the truck driver or his helper must come onto your property to collect. If you drag it out to the streetside once a week, the minimum charge is \$65 a year.

If you have two pickups a week on your property, the fee is \$144 a year; if you leave your rubbish at the curb, it costs \$120 a year for twice-a-week collection.

From the point of view of the collector, streetside collections are a great time-saver. The truck driver's time is saved since he needn't negotiate the narrow driveways, lift the garage doors or wrestle the bin where home-owners store their trash barrels.

"Time is money" isn't an original thought, and all of us can sympathize with the businessman who must buy the trucks, pay the help, carry the workmen's compensation insurance, pay the dump fees, and bear the expense of other incidentals involved in the rubbish collection business.

Still, it's hardly equitable that a family with less than one full 20-gallon barrel should be charged the same as the householder disposing of three times as much. If we are to be

charged by volume, those who generate a large amount of trash should pay their fair share.

As things stand, the recycler who carries paper and glass to the recycling center and composts vegetable wastes subsidizes those who are unconcerned about ecology, waste or economy.

Good sense it's not. It stands to reason there should be some small economic rewards for the concerned citizens who fight waste. Wasters, not conservers, should be penalized, if either is to come out ahead.

Conservationists, like the virtuous, find their life-style is its own reward, of course, but it does rankle to pay the freight for the thoughtless and unconcerned.

Aside from the obvious inequality, there's the unsightly -- distinctly un-beautiful -- display of streetside garbage belonging to those who must economize. One of the really nice things about our villages has always been the preponderance of lovely homes and attractive residential neighborhoods, unmarred by streetside trash awaiting collection.

- Still, the cost-of-living today being what it is, every dollar saved is a dollar earned.

It would be inconvenient, to say the least, for rubbish collectors to charge by the pound rather than by volume, just as without question it's inconvenient for supermarkets to display unit prices for every item on the shelves.

If what we bring home costs us so much per pound, however, why shouldn't we pay on the same basis for disposing of the residue? Or, at the very least, be able to schedule pick-ups to accommodate the needs of each residential unit, with families requiring the most service paying the highest fees?

If you don't need medical care, you don't pay for it. If you consult an attorney, you pay only for the service you use. You don't pay more for gasoline than your car consumes.

There is a solution, of course; you can arrange to have your trash collected less frequently, and get your money's worth. Recyclers, because they generate less trash, can come out ahead. They may need a couple of additional 20-gallon trash cans for storage, but that's a one-time investment and will quickly pay for itself.

If you're a recycler and continue to flatten tin cans and recycle everything possible, you'll find you benefit economically, and virtue will continue to be its own reward, into the bargain.

Fewer pickups will mean less energy used to operate the heavy trucks, less traffic on the streets (and it costs money, big money, to repair streets broken up by heavy trucks), less air pollution from truck exhausts benefits all around. It might even encourage more people to become recyclers; that would mean more space in the dump, more income to the town since the recycling center is a paying proposition, and lower taxes.

You might find you could cut your waste disposal expense considerably by making one telephone call and a slight adjustment in your housekeeping methods.

Wouldn't that be nice?