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### Technical Bulletins: Do You Really Know How Much Your Landfill Costs?

MTAS

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## technical bulletin

Municipal Technical Advisory Service  
Institute for Public Service, The University of Tennessee  
In cooperation with the Tennessee Municipal League

May 4, 1973

### DO YOU REALLY KNOW HOW MUCH YOUR LANDFILL COSTS?

The cost of operating a sanitary landfill is more than just the amount of one man's salary and one machine to move dirt and compact the solid waste. There are many expenses that often are overlooked in estimating the potential cost of a landfill or budgeting for an existing one, as pointed up by a study done by MTAS Engineering and Public Works Consultant Frank Kirk:

#### DEVELOPMENT COSTS

Are you including, under this heading, fencing and a gate; a good road, which can be the key to an effective landfill operation in bad weather; a sign; an equipment and operator's building required by state regulations; first aid and miscellaneous supplies; a water line and fire fighting equipment? And what about engineering costs? In a study of eight operations across the state, these items totaled from \$582 to \$2,154 per year.

#### OPERATING COSTS

Most cities include equipment expenses, but many make too optimistic an estimate of the life of their machines; it's closer to five than ten years. And do you include funds for equipment operation and maintenance; miscellaneous equipment such as a motor grader to work the road; the time supervisory, administrative and clerical personnel spend on this operation (the superintendent of public works may be devoting 20 per cent of his time to the landfill); payroll expenses for workers, such as Social Security, hospitalization, etc. This last item can run from eight to twenty per cent of salary figures.

#### TRANSFER COSTS

Based on the assumption that a transfer station is part of the disposal operation (the state recognizes this), all costs after collection is completed must be disposal. Far too often, transfer costs are omitted from estimates of disposal expenses. The transfer cost is based on the average number of trips per week to the landfill, with the distance taken from the center of town to the disposal site. A truck operating cost of 25 cents per mile includes depreciation, fuel, maintenance, repairs and salvage value. The driver's salary and the collection crew riding the truck averages \$2.00 per hour (this could be higher or lower, depending upon the city's salary scale). Are you including these items in your cost estimate or budget for waste disposal?

#### MULTIPLE OPERATIONS

Cities with dual disposal operations (landfill and transfer station, one landfill for garbage and another for brush, landfill and incinerator) should look at their cost figures carefully. If you want to hold down expenses, avoid more than one method of disposal. For example, a chipper can prepare brush for disposal in the same landfill used for other refuse.

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The cost per capita for refuse disposal varies widely from city to city. However, the total cost of operating a landfill for 20,000 people is about the same as that for a fill serving 5,000. The same basic operations are required in both cases.

Smaller cities can run into problems by buying equipment too large for the size of their operation. A smaller tractor may have to be worked a few hours longer. But that is preferable to letting a larger machine and operator sit idle for long periods of time.

It should be noted that the cost of land was not considered in the MTAS study. It is reasonable to assume the land will be worth as much or more than the original purchase price, provided the land was bought at current market value.

#### TIME TO APPLY

City officials should remember that June 30, 1973 (and each year thereafter), is the deadline for filing an application, with the Solid Waste Management Division of the Tennessee Department of Public Health, for the state solid waste disposal grant (\$0.75 per capita). Presently this application is required of all cities and counties wishing to obtain grant funds, whether or not they operate the landfill. And even if your city completed an application last year a new one must be done each year under present procedures.

If your city is part of a joint landfill operation, you must file with your application a copy of the agreement(s) between your city and the county or other cities. If such an agreement or contract hasn't been adopted, now is the time to get the ball rolling.

According to the latest information available, solid waste disposal grant application forms will be sent to cities and counties the last week in May. If you don't receive a form or if you have questions, contact the Solid Waste Management Division's regional office nearest you: 5616 Kingston Pike, Knoxville 37919; 320 Capitol Hill Bldg., Nashville 37219; 6200 Bldg., Suite 6100, Eastgate Center, Chattanooga 37411; Oakmont Towers, Office 201, 646 Old Hickory, Jackson 38301; or P. O. Box 2871, Johnson City 37601.

This brief was prepared for the information of Tennessee city officials. If more details are desired, contact the Municipal Technical Advisory Service, Institute for Public Service, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee 37916.