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## Plan to dump Bay Area trash in Nevada draws fire

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A waste management firm's plan to ship millions of tons of California's trash to a proposed landfill on a desert playa near Winnemucca has brought protests from Nevada residents who say the dump will pollute the environment and that the state shouldn't be America's trash bin.

Recology, a waste management service, has proposed shipping 20,000 tons per week of the Bay Area's waste to the proposed landfill 28 miles west of Winnemucca in Humboldt County. The garbage would contain household trash, as well as asbestos, rubber tires and dried sewage sludge. It would be shipped by rail in sealed containers.

Estimates place the amount of trash at about 1 million tons a year for up to 95 years. At those volumes, the plan could annually generate about \$1 million in "host fees" for the county.

### Differing views

Some Humboldt County residents see the landfill plan as a way for the area to have a guaranteed income stream for the future.

Opponents envision an environmental nightmare of water pollution, foul smells and the trashing of the desert playa.

The landfill would eventually be a mountain of trash 20 stories high.

"Shipping 4,000 tons a day of California's trash to Humboldt County for 95 years is ludicrous," said Humboldt County Commissioner Tom Fransway, the only member of five commissioners to publicly oppose the plan. "This is my home. I don't want to see California's garbage come here. It would be degrading to our community and to the state of Nevada."

The firm has the green light from the county to seek the state permits needed to complete the project.

For the proposal to proceed, Recology needs air, water and waste permits to satisfy environmental regulations.

Adam Alberti, Recology's spokesman, said the proposal has been public for two years, but there are no contracts in place to ship waste. He said the firm is preparing for the future as California's landfills fill up and creating new dumps becomes more difficult.

He said the landfill would be double-lined to insure the waste material would not pollute ground water. The site is such that leakage through the trash pile would not occur, he said.

"Even if there were some failure of the liners, there would be no danger to the aquifer," Alberti said. "Water would have to travel uphill for that to occur."

The plan, he said, presents "no health, safety or environmental problems because of the way it's engineered and the precautions we're taking."

### Opponents seek specifics

Jim French, a member of Nevadans Against Garbage, a group that opposes the landfill, said neither the firm nor state regulators have offered any specifics that would show the plan is safe.

“From a regulatory perspective, I’ve never seen anything that has flown under the radar as this project has done,” said French, a biologist and Winnemucca resident who recently retired from the Nevada Department of Wildlife. “As far as I can tell, no one has looked into the impacts of this or seen specific engineering plans or any of the things you would see if you proposed a mine or a gravel pit or even a septic tank on private land.”

He said residents haven’t received any answers to questions including: the source of water to keep down dust at the site, what materials will be used to line the trash heap, how the firm will deal with the site becoming a quagmire in spring and summer and whether reclamation plans, environmental analyses, plans for the protection of native wildlife, operation plans and mediation plans exist.

“There are nothing but unanswered questions, an effort to squash local resistance to the dump and people saying it’s a done deal,” French said.

Winnemucca Mayor Di An Putnam has noted the site also would accept locally generated trash and that Winnemucca needs a new landfill and better economic development opportunities.

Opponents said that Winnemucca’s annual share of the trash is equal to just a few day’s worth of the Bay Area’s garbage.

Fransway said no one has been empowered to negotiate “hosting fees” for the county and said if Recology thinks it will save money and sidestep tough California regulations by opening a landfill in Nevada, it is mistaken.

“Humboldt County will be in the driver’s seat,” he said. “We will not be duped.”

Reid weighs in

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., weighed in on the matter last week when he urged Gov. Jim Gibbons to direct the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection and “all other relevant parts of state government to use every available authority to block this threat to Nevada’s sovereignty and dignity.”

Reid said the environmental permits shouldn’t be issued to Recology because the site is in an active earthquake zone and the water table is so shallow beneath the dry lake bed.

Gibbons told the Reno Gazette-Journal last week that the interstate transportation of trash is a federal matter and that Reid should talk to Democrats in Congress about regulating it.

## Additional Facts

### A CLOSER LOOK

#### TRASHING NEVADA

Nevada doesn’t want to be the nation’s garbage can, but the country has often looked at the Silver State’s vast deserts and rugged mountain ranges as a convenient dumping area.

- o The Lockwood Landfill about seven miles east of the Truckee Meadows receives hundreds of tons per day of garbage from the Sacramento area and South Lake Tahoe. The West Wendover landfill in Nevada takes waste from the neighboring town of Wendover, Utah.

- o In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the federal government considered a plan to install real and fake missiles in the deserts of eastern Nevada and western Utah, forcing the Soviet Union to concentrate much of its nuclear arsenal on those areas.

- o In the mid-1980s, the state received many applications from companies wanting to open sites to process and store hazardous waste from outside the state. The Legislature passed a law making it virtually impossible to open a toxic site in Nevada.

- o In 1982, the federal government started looking at the Yucca Mountain site in Southern Nevada for a high-level nuclear waste storage facility. The process is ongoing, but Congress has stripped the funding for further work on the project.

Source: RGJ research

