

THE SUSTAINABLE VISION FOR WASHINGTON'S SOLID WASTE SYSTEM

ROUND TABLE MEETING 1

March 13, 2001

GENERAL MEETING SUMMARY

The Work Has Just Begun

The "Sustainable Vision for Washington State's Solid Waste System" round table meeting series brings community, business, and government together to identify coordinated approaches to solid waste issues. In spring 2001 meetings are being held in each of four regions throughout the state – a total of sixteen meetings – to develop regional recommendations for revising the State Solid Waste Plan.

Background

Ecology is coordinating the effort to revise the State Solid Waste Plan, which was last updated in 1991. RCW 70.95.260 directs Ecology to coordinate the development of a plan for all areas of the state that "looks to the future for twenty years as a guide in carrying out a state coordinated solid waste management program." The draft vision for the revised plan incorporates the top priority for handling waste, which is waste reduction, as stated in the Solid Waste Management – Recovery & Recycling Law – 70.95 RCW.

In early March 2001 "Meeting 1" of the four-meeting series was held in four regions across the state – eastern, central, southwest, and northwest. Participants discussed solid waste issues of importance in the region, reviewed a draft vision, and received a copy of "Issues Identification: Issues for Consideration and Discussion," Ecology publication # 01-07-001. This document summarizes the work to date on issues identification by Ecology staff, Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC) members and other

NORTHWEST REGION

WHERE WE WANT TO GO - REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Review of Draft Vision for Solid Waste Planning

Participants reviewed a draft long-range vision that reaches beyond the 20 year planning horizon. They raised issues of importance in their region regarding the impact, challenges and opportunities such a vision would pose solid waste in their region.

A sustainable economic system exists, based on resource and energy conservation, pollution prevention, waste reduction and material reuse. The historically separate efforts to protect the environment and to promote economic development have merged.

Businesses balance material and energy use with practices that reinvest in environmental capital, recognizing that such stewardship is the basis for their survival and profit.

Individuals recognize their role in achieving and maintaining sustainability as inhabitants and consumers. Consumers demand, are provided with, and choose goods and services with the lowest life-cycle impacts on energy and materials use.

Government economic development policies provide incentives to businesses and industry to achieve and maintain sustainability.

Communities create and sustain local systems that support growth within the limits of the environmental carrying capacity.

stakeholders for consideration in the state plan revision and is available on the project web site at: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/swplan>. The issue papers fall into three general headings: where we want to go, what we need to do today, and how we will move toward a more sustainable future. Throughout the round table meeting series participants will explore each of the issue paper topics as they relate to these headings.

Participants at the Meeting 1 sessions identified solid waste issues unique to their regions that relate to the draft sustainable vision. These issues, along with others raised in the earlier issue papers, were examined for their importance in the state solid waste plan revision. This summary of regional issues identified in Meeting 1 will serve as the foundation for the continued development of regional recommendations. Regional discussion points can be found in the *Where We Want To Go - Regional Perspectives* section of this summary.

Joining In

The regional round table series is designed for regions to work together to address jointly identified solid waste issues. Participants will recommend an overall, mutually beneficial approach to the state solid waste plan that takes into consideration regionally specific needs.

Participants of Meeting 1 formed the initial foundation for the regionally specific dialogue regarding solid waste issues. All "stakeholders" (all interested residents) throughout the state are encouraged to join their regional dialogues during the three remaining meetings.

OVERVIEW OF FOUR MEETING SERIES

The goal of the round table meetings is to provide a forum for participants to work directly together with other stakeholders and have maximum possible input to the state solid waste plan revision at a regional level. This proactive involvement engages participants in dialogue with others of like mind who share similar interests on solid waste issues in "sectors." The following are the self-defining sectors that participants at Meeting 1 worked in:

- Business
- Environmental
- Government
- Solid Waste Industry
- Community and Civic Groups

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

-Scope of the Vision -

As it reads currently, the draft vision focuses on a larger picture of resource management, not just solid waste management. The draft vision affects all resource-based, regulatory functions in the state and goes well beyond the regulatory functions of solid waste government. The question was raised if this is the proper role for the state solid waste plan, or is it a vision for the state. The question of where it would best be housed needs to be addressed.

Concern was raised that the draft vision is unattainable because it is too broad. The concern is that people would not take it seriously. The problem is not the vision per se; the question is how best to articulate the portion that is solid waste management related.

The plan needs to recognize that solid waste management is just one aspect of dealing with a vision like this, which is for a higher good.

Throughout discussions on sustainability, examples of residuals and solid waste are provided to illustrate indicators of movement toward or lack of sustainability. The field of solid waste is one of the cornerstones-and we need to provide the leadership.

Waste reduction, product stewardship, and recycling programs, especially for things like plastics, tires, and other materials will be necessary elements to address in the state plan revision.

This work toward sustainability needs to be housed outside of this plan, as it is larger than just solid waste. The State Solid Waste Plan does play a key part in this. It will need to answer what the solid waste industry needs to do, and to approach sustainability from larger context. The plan should articulate a 'call' for changes outside the solid waste industry to the broader society and suggest what they can do. This overarching context does need to happen within the plan revision.

Concern was raised that the bigger purpose is to have a more sustainable planet. It was questioned if the vision should emphasize "economic" up front and if the word "growth" fit in there.

The vision needs to look at the solid waste issue as an opportunity, not a problem. An example was given that there are positive attributes to solid waste that can be generated such as these sites that can have positive uses after they are closed.

Participants decide, based on their interests in solid waste issues, which of these groups they wish to work with. The perspectives unique to each of these sectors will be reflected in the regional recommendations to the state solid waste plan revision. Issues in common within regions and across the state will be considered in the overall statewide recommendations.

The April, May, and June meetings in each region will provide on-going discussion regarding a sustainable vision for solid waste.

In April, participants will identify milestones for the issues identified by participants in Meeting 1. The two goals of the April meetings are to identify indicators for sustainability for a long-term vision, beyond 60 years, and also to determine sustainability-related milestones that meet the current solid waste systems' needs.

In May, participants will identify strategies and alternatives they wish to see considered for the region to achieve the milestones identified in April.

In June, participants will bring together the vision, milestones, and strategies into a regional recommendation to support movement toward a sustainable approach to solid waste.

OUTCOMES FOR PLAN DEVELOPMENT

State Solid Waste Plan

The State Solid Waste Plan is a blueprint or guide that provides a long-range vision for solid waste activities around the state. The state solid waste plan has been updated three times since 1972, and is currently a decade old. New waste streams have emerged and conditions, economically, socially, and environmentally have changed in the state. Ecology recognized that the plan no longer serves as a current guide to coordinating solid waste programs and that a revision to lead us into the future is needed.

What the Revision Will Do

The foundation of this state solid waste plan revision is to create a more sustainable future, which includes the recognition that the solid waste being managed and disposed of represents a significant drain on the state resources needed to support our society and quality of life.

The revised plan will serve as a blueprint for local communities and state and federal agencies that implement solid waste and natural resource programs. It will provide direction on

The state plan revision needs to identify what the solid waste industry, government, and private industry need to do in the next 20 years. The plan should also issue the call for what others need to do. It needs to be clearly stated that the solid waste industry is sorry they cannot do all aspects and identify what others will need to do to assist in reaching the vision.

There is a call for this broader vision as a way that society needs to operate, and it may be that there are 50 different fields that need to respond. Solid waste is one of them. Somewhere down the line the plan needs to be specific about what the solid waste industry needs to do.

- Role of Industry and Business -

It was noted that many of the goals being discussed in relation to the draft vision would already be happening if they were beneficial in the current system. We have a free market system that seems to be working very well for a number of people-the leave-it-alone system is going to have to change for that free market system to change-there have to be major changes on the national level to regulate or drive different behavior. At this time many of these issues are much bigger than the solid waste industry.

Regulations in Japan, Australia, and other countries may restrict their use of products in the future to those that have had some type of upstream or downstream analysis. Our region is poised better than many to work within product stewardship principles. We have to look at the long-term viability of our region; we have an opportunity to do things here to maintain a strong economic base. If the region does not stay competitive in the manufacture of products, then we will lose the markets for those products.

How can the business practices best be addressed? It is clear that there is a need for a change of behavior? How will this work at a time when government is moving away from regulation?

Economic considerations within the free market system need to change in the move toward sustainability.

Product stewardship opportunities and responsibilities exist in this region, as the area is poised within the global market to be a leader.

- Growth -

Traffic challenges the ability to move materials, opportunities exist to move them, but if transportation costs double it may no longer be feasible to do so.

Rapid growth results in having to build larger stations for materials. For example, Snohomish County is building two

the regulatory and voluntary roles, as well as outline partnerships with others in the community that can help reduce waste and its impacts. The revision includes looking at a larger portion of the solid waste universe than has been planned for in the past. The plan will result in impacts to and involvement of many different stakeholders than traditionally have been involved. The plan revision should provide the framework and goals for everyone's role in managing waste more sustainably.

It is possible that the recommendations for the revision could be regional in nature and not be "one-size-fits-all." Regional needs can be taken into account in this way.

An orientation to the state plan revision history was provided at Meeting 1 and is summarized briefly in the following section:

History of the Process to Date

Ecology began working with the State SWAC and a number of local government officials in early 2000 on the approach for updating the plan. The initial idea was to update the plan in phases. Information revealed in this early phase of work indicated that a quick update would not be as useful to local governments as a full revision to the state solid waste plan. Throughout the focus groups, interviews, and discussions in 2000 two common themes arose regarding the direction for the future of solid waste: waste prevention and sustainability.

Work groups were formed to explore issues and provide background necessary to determine what elements will be included in the revision to the state solid waste plan. The groups had broad representation with over sixty people from outside Ecology. Over fifty meetings to date were conducted to develop the issue papers, which provide the foundation for the round table discussions. The full text of the issue papers can be found in the "Issues Identification" document*. The issues covered were not meant to be exhaustive of all the issues related to solid waste; they include the following topics:

- Sources and Quantities of Solid Waste
- Roles, Responsibilities, and Authorities
- Litter and Illegal Dumping
- Collection
- Waste Disposal Reduction and Avoidance
- Waste Reduction

new transfer stations in the next two years. Flexibility to design them for 20 years out provides a current opportunity to do things differently.

Rural zoning adjacent to urban areas present regulatory structures that are not coordinated with other solid waste issues, such as the burn bans and their negative impact on increasing the transportation of previously burnable waste. Another concern raised was the mandated use of biosolids when land clearing permits are requested.

Excellent environmental technology is available all over the world. The region could learn from that, move toward product stewardship, and possibly be in a position to export it.

Zoning in the Northwest region affects opportunities for solid waste handling options. The zoning options needed to have the facilities necessary to do the job are restricted.

While some counties in the northwest region have direct access to markets and are close to manufacturers, others have transportation issues that create obstacles to get goods to the market.

REGIONAL ISSUE IDENTIFICATION BY SECTOR

Participants explored issues of regional importance for a vision of solid waste that incorporates the theme of sustainability. Breakout groups provided the opportunity to explore the issues from the perspectives of government, solid waste industry, business, environment, and community and civic groups. Five main topics, from the issue papers were provided as discussion points: Universe of Solid Waste, Waste Prevention, Waste Diversion, True Cost of Solid Waste, Sustainability, see the general meeting summary's *Issue Identification by Sector and Region* section for additional detail on these headings. Participants also had the opportunity to raise additional issues in the small groups. All of these were reviewed for the level of importance they may play in the state plan revision process.

While participants were given the opportunity to rank 2 high, medium, and low issues for inclusion in the state plan revision; these were not intended as a voting mechanism for the process. These 'rankings' provided the participants a dialogue starting point. In the full group discussion that followed the breakouts, participants further explained the additional issues raised. The following summarizes the issues and their importance by sector.

- Product Stewardship
- Landfills, Past, Present and Future
- True Costs of Solid Waste (includes Economics of Recycling)
- Recycling

* Ecology publication Issues Identification: Issues for Consideration and Discussion, # 01-07-001 contains each of the issue papers and is available on the project web site, <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/swfa/swplan>

Outcome of the Round Table Meetings

The plan recommendations are not written at this time; there is no drafted language to review and comment on. The recommendations drafted at the regional round tables will provide a foundation for the next phase of feasibility study and revision language development, which will follow the round tables in summer of 2001.

March – June 2001 is the time to identify what is needed to create a state solid waste plan that will have support from the diverse stakeholders who will be asked to participate in implementation activities. The door is wide open; there is flexibility to determine what is needed for the future. The draft language for the state solid waste plan will come out in Spring of 2002, and will be finalized in Summer 2002.

DIVERSITY OF PERSPECTIVES ON SOLID WASTE

The March round table meetings centered on where we want to go – what we want our future solid waste system to look like. Thoughts and ideas raised in several of the issue papers (contained in the “Issues Identification” document) relate to this future system and what it should accomplish.

Universe of Solid Waste

Issue Paper #1 Sources and Quantities of Solid Waste from the “Issues Identification” document examines the types and sources of solid waste in Washington State. A diagram depicting this universe of solid waste was presented to participants for consideration in the scope of the plan revision. The current and increasing levels of waste generation, new waste streams, and increasing impact on our resources, financial, social, and environmental give rise to need for consideration of all categories of non-hazardous, non-radioactive solid wastes in this plan

Government Breakout Group

Participants in the government perspectives group added two additional issues to the five originally provided: financial stability for adequate resources to manage plan and system objectives in a flexible manner, and focus on immediate needs, e.g. plastics recycling, and develop long-term sustainable methods for recycling and reusing those materials. Those considered highly important for consideration in the plan revision were waste prevention and financial stability. Participants noted that waste prevention has the highest payback. To address this now can save the need for development of future infrastructures. Some felt that waste diversion would also be addressed in waste prevention.

The true costs, from the participants perspective, fits into other topics and provides the foundation or tools to think about how people are charged costs for having their wastes managed. Sustainability was valued and considered the umbrella for all these other topics; it captures things like product stewardship. The market development that falls under immediate needs fits under the sustainability issue as well. The universe of solid waste was not seen as so important, because those topics are already well defined.

Solid Waste Industry Breakout Group

Participants in this group felt very strongly that waste diversion is a key issue. The materials that are available need to get to recyclers. These recyclers in turn need to be provided the ability to process this material. Obstacles to recovery processes include regulations that regulate how something is done, instead of the result. This approach limits the innovation of the industry, ideas need to be given free reign, as something that may not look feasible today, could get the desired results being sought.

True costs were also a concern. The number of landfills that are out there today that could become superfund sites tomorrow need to be considered in calculating true costs. Who ever generates the waste needs to be paying the true costs of that waste. Sustainability was also a high priority, though it is more of a long-term goal. To begin with today, the focus needs to be on diversion and doing as much as possible with those materials. Once this occurs, everybody will start to grasp the concepts of sustainability. Land availability in Europe has driven their innovations; these can be made to work in our society as well.

revision. This includes the following categories:

- Municipal waste
- Industrial waste
- Resource use and extraction waste
- Transfer waste
- Inert waste
- Moderate risk waste

Sustainability

Participants were challenged to look beyond existing systems and consider longer-term visions of sustainability in their region. Sustainability was explained as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

A question arose in all regions regarding this theme of sustainability. Where did it come from? The foundation work done over the past year found sustainability was a consistent theme, in focus groups, work groups, local solid waste plans’ visions and goal statements, as well as the state law that names waste reduction as the first priority. Increasingly, the federal direction for solid waste, which also informs the state’s future, is moving toward more sustainable approaches to solid waste. All these factors led to establishing sustainability as the focus for the state plan.

Where previous plan revisions and subsequent funding centered on recycling and the Municipal Waste Stream; there have not been great strides in waste reduction systems. While a strong recycling infrastructure does exist in the state, it is experiencing limiting factors. We will need to invest in the future while maintaining the current solid waste system to make the transitions necessary to get to where we want to go.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

Review of Draft Vision for Solid Waste Planning

Participants reviewed a draft long-range vision that reaches beyond the 20 year planning horizon. They raised issues of importance in their region regarding the impact, challenges and opportunities such a vision would pose solid waste in their region. A summary of the regional responses are located in the *Regional Review of the Draft Vision* section of this document.

Community & Civic Breakout Group

The universe of solid waste and true costs were the highest priority for the one participant in this group. These topics address the whole spectrum of resources that can be reused through the solid waste system. Under true costs, there are also externalities, not just costs; these include the assets and values of property. An example was provided concerning Cedar Hills landfill. It is contributing something like \$15 million to the community.

The concepts of waste diversion and waste prevention, as articulated in the support information were not separate and equally deserve attention in the revision. Sustainability was identified as a valuable perspective, and two additional issues were raised regarding social considerations. The first was the public perception of fairness in regard to regulations and practices of solid waste management. Most communities have experienced NIMBY and most of us have something in our backyard. People should not have two of those things. The second additional issue is maintaining a community friendly disposal system. This includes minimizing noise such as backup beepers, location of transfer stations, and responses to complaints of solid waste.

Environmental Breakout Group

Participants expressed that sustainability was noted as the vision and not really a key issue, as it is really the basket that holds the rest of details of the discussion. Within their discussion, product stewardship was included in all issues that were discussed, as this is a very important piece of the discussion around sustainability and solid waste. Waste prevention was also considered highly important for inclusion in a revision to the state solid waste plan.

Understanding and conveying the true costs of solid waste is another important element for the state plan to address. In addition, waste diversion opportunities and activities should also be addressed.

There was confusion in the group regarding the universe of solid waste and its role in the plan revision. This group did not consider it a high priority if it were already a given to be included. In addition, the limits on selection of issues of priority placed it lower than others.

Additional issues for consideration include a reduction of toxics and pathogens in recycled product and the feasibility of developing an economic plan or vehicle for reaching product stewardship goals.

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION BY SECTOR AND REGION

Participants explored issues of regional importance for a vision of solid waste that incorporates the theme of sustainability. Breakout groups provided the opportunity to explore the issues from the perspectives of government, solid waste industry, business, environment, and community and civic groups. Participants had the opportunity to raise additional issues to the five main topics, drawn from issue papers that were provided as discussion points. These included:

Universe of Solid Waste: Focus on addressing the sources and generation points of various waste materials throughout the extraction, processing, manufacturing, sale, use and disposal.

Waste reduction: Concentrate on dealing with materials that are currently considered waste and look for ways to turn them into products. Preventing and/or reducing the volume and/or toxicity of waste.

Waste disposal diversion: Emphasize the diversion of waste materials that are generated out of end disposal by diverting them to other uses (such as land application).

True costs: Focus on accounting for all of the costs of solid waste decisions pertaining to current system or new ways of doing things, such as social, resource, health, pollution, and economic.

Sustainability: Focus on the creation of a future system that promotes sustainability, which generally is defined as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

While participants were given the opportunity to rank two high, medium, and low issues for inclusion in the state plan revision; these were not intended as a voting mechanism for the process. These 'rankings' provided the participants a dialogue starting point. In the full group discussion that followed the breakouts, participants further explained the additional issues raised and those of high importance to the sectors of perspective. A summary of the region's the issues and their importance by sector are located in the *Regional Issues Identification by Sector* section of this document.

Business Breakout Group

Participants in the business perspective group identified waste prevention as a top starting point. Although business already knows about sustainability, the vision of where to go will need to be clearly articulated to increase understanding and participation. The other highly important issue to address is the need for more information on the true costs of the universe of solid waste. True cost is the operating principle of product stewardship. Participants considered these issues more thematic of a sustainability vision for solid waste and this was reflected in their importance in the discussion.

Waste diversion is an issue of importance, as increased acceptance is needed to further efforts in this arena. With support for activities like composting and remediation, more options will become available.

Product stewardship was added by participants as an additional issue of importance in the solid waste vision. It was considered important though the limit in rankings did not allow for all the issues to be considered highly important. Participants in this group felt it is important to frame the discussion of waste as a resource issue. Resources are embedded in products, so a product management policy is needed instead of a waste management policy. With this approach, more resources begin to be available to deal with issues.

This group considered the universe of solid waste has having more to do with the nuts and bolts of what businesses need to face, dealing with inventory, suppliers, disposal, even when a corporation has a vision of sustainability with their plan. Some businesses do not want the spotlight even though they're doing more than other businesses because it creates expectations, and industry already follows stringent regulations. To encourage more partnerships in addressing the universe of solid waste, businesses need positive incentives and the regulatory environment to do the right thing.

CLOSING DRAFT VISION REVIEW BY PARTICIPANTS

Participants provided their feedback on the how the sector rankings reflect on the overall issues of sustainability, unique regional conditions, and the draft vision during their recap of the small group work. Due to traffic events delaying the start of the meeting, this discussion was merged with the short summaries provided after the break out groups and can be reviewed there.

THE NEXT STEP

Participants at Meeting 1 were encouraged to note who needs to be present at these round tables to capture the diversity of perspectives in the region. Those present appreciated that many new stakeholders play a fundamental role in developing regionally relevant perspectives on a sustainable vision for Washington State's solid waste system. The networking efforts within the region will continue to encourage participation throughout the meeting series.

Each of the four regional meetings will build upon work done in the previous meeting. The diversity of perspectives on solid waste issues and sustainability identified in Meeting 1 will be considered in the next steps.

At the April meeting, participants will start by examining the issues identified in Meeting 1. The two goals of the April meetings are to identify indicators for sustainability for a long-term vision, beyond 60 years, and also to determine sustainability-related milestones that meet the current solid waste systems' needs.

In May, participants will identify strategies and alternatives they wish to see considered for the region to achieve the milestones identified in April.

June meeting participants will draw together the vision, milestones, and strategies into a regional recommendation to support movement toward a sustainable approach to solid waste.

All are welcome and encouraged to join their regional dialogues during the three remaining meetings. Your views on the vision will directly contribute to regional recommendations. Join us for this opportunity to contribute to the Washington State's economic vitality, ecological health, and social well being.



Ecology is an equal opportunity agency.

If you have special accommodation needs, contact Michelle Payne at (360) 407-6129 (Voice) or (360) 407-6006 TDD.

THE NEXT STEP

At the April round table meeting Northwest Region participants will be tasked to consider how best to identify the milestones and strategies that will address the following issues regional importance that were identified by participants at the meeting.

Waste prevention

Waste diversion

True cost

Sustainability

Universe of waste

Financial stability for adequate resources to manage plan and system objectives in a flexible manner

Focus on immediate needs

"Who ever generates needs to pay the right price"

Public perception of fairness

Community-friendly municipal solid waste disposal

Reduction of toxins and pathogens in recycling end products

Feasibility of developing an economic plan or vehicle for reaching product stewardship goals

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