

1.6

DEPARTMENT OF  
PUBLIC WORKS  
SOLID WASTE DIVISION

CITY OF SACRAMENTO  
CALIFORNIA

921 TENTH STREET  
SUITE 500  
SACRAMENTO, CA  
95814-2715

ADMINISTRATION  
PHONE 916-264-7043  
FAX 916-264-7771

CUSTOMER SERVICE  
PHONE 916-264-5757

November 20, 1997

City Council  
Sacramento, California

Honorable Members in Session:

**SUBJECT:** DISCUSSION OF ISSUES REGARDING BAGGING OF GREEN  
WASTE DURING WET WEATHER

**LOCATION AND COUNCIL DISTRICT:** CITY

**RECOMMENDATION:**

This report is for information only.

**CONTACT PERSON:** Reina I. Schwartz, Manager, Solid Waste, 264-7043

**FOR COUNCIL MEETING OF:** December 9, 1997

**SUMMARY:**

This report explores the feasibility of bagging green waste for curbside collection in order to mitigate localized street flooding due potentially wetter-than-average conditions as a result of El Niño. Due to various considerations, City staff recommend that the City Council take no action to change current policies and practices.

**COMMITTEE/COMMISSION ACTION:**

None required.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

The City's Solid Waste Division currently collects 80,000 tons of uncontainerized yard waste on an annual basis. Approximately 20,000 tons of green waste are collected during the autumn leaf season alone. In conjunction with Fall and Winter rain, the City often experiences localized street flooding due to clogging of storm drains and sewers. Due to additional concerns this year as a result of the potential for a wetter-than-average winter, this report explores the feasibility of bagging green waste to mitigate localized street flooding. The analysis below reveals significant barriers to implementing a program for the bagging of green wastes.

**Restrictions on containerization.** Measure A, adopted on 09-27-77, and reaffirmed by Measure F in 1987, states:

- Residents cannot be required to containerize yard waste for collection; and,
- This restriction cannot be amended or repealed without a majority vote of the electors of the City of Sacramento.

Title 19 of the City Code was amended by Ordinance 95-052 and approved by the City Council on October 17, 1995. This ordinance grants the City Manager the emergency authority to prohibit the placement of garden refuse in City streets. Under emergency conditions such as heavy rainfall, the City Manager can impose a temporary prohibition on placing garden refuse at the curb in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the general public.

**Contamination.** The City maintains nonprofessional services agreements with L & D Recycling and Waste Management Collection and Recycling, Inc. to process and divert City green waste. The agreements stipulate that the City will endeavor to reduce the level of contamination contained within green waste. Loads containing an inordinate amount of contamination cannot be diverted and end up landfilled.

The Solid Waste Division, as part of an ongoing public education program, has communicated to the public the importance of reducing the amount of contamination in green waste. This message has been carried through utility bill messages and the Backyard Compost Program for several years. The major source of green waste contamination is the presence of plastic bags. Some residents bag their yard waste to reduce the residue left by the "claw". Residents who attend backyard compost workshops are encouraged to use cardboard boxes in lieu of plastic bags if they feel the need to containerize their yard waste at the curb. Cardboard boxes are more compatible with green waste processing.

Biodegradable bags, which would be beneficial from a composting point of view, are expensive and still pose serious problems related to processing. A large percentage of the

City's green waste is processed into mulch products, which are not fully composted. As a result, the latest generation of biodegradable bags still poses the threat of significantly contaminating our green waste. A high level of contamination could significantly increase green waste processing costs while potentially reducing the City's ability to divert some portion of its green waste. For example, Cal-Trans specifications for mulch will not tolerate in excess of 1/10 of 1% plastic. Even an expensive, fully biodegradable bag would remain intact when processing green waste into a mulch product because mulch products undergo limited, if any, decomposition.

**Implementation issues.** Communities that require citizens to bag green waste for manual collection normally begin implementation by providing residents with approximately one dozen bags, distributed to homeowners in much the same way as phone books. Following the initial distribution, outlets such as grocery and hardware stores will then carry the bags for sale specified by the City. The cost of bags can be as high as \$ 0.25 each. Because residents must then purchase the type of bag specified by the City, the cooperation of residents is problematic.

In view of the above considerations, City staff do not recommend encouraging residents to bag yard waste.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

The cost of a one-time bag distribution could easily exceed \$140,000. This represents an estimated minimum cost of \$1.20 per household plus approximately \$10,000 to pay for the door-to-door distribution. Following the initial distribution, residents would be required to purchase bags from retail outlets. Many biodegradable bags available today can cost up to \$ 0.25-\$ 0.35/each.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS:**

This report is for information only. Since no action is recommended for City Council approval, environmental considerations do not apply to this report.

#### **POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:**

The City cannot require residents to containerize yard waste without a vote of the electors. However, existing City ordinances do authorize the City Manager to prohibit yard waste from being placed at curbside during an emergency.

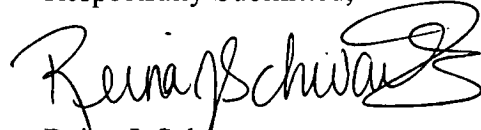
The public outreach and education program by the Departments of Utilities and Public Works explicitly encourages residents to refrain from placing garden refuse at the curb during heavy precipitation as a means of reducing localized street flooding. Education materials such as the "Winter Tips" newsletter also emphasize the need to place garden refuse at the curb to avoid impeding the flow of water to storm drains and sewers.

City Council  
Discussion of Issues Regarding Bagging of Green Waste During Wet Weather  
11/20/97

**MBE/WBE**

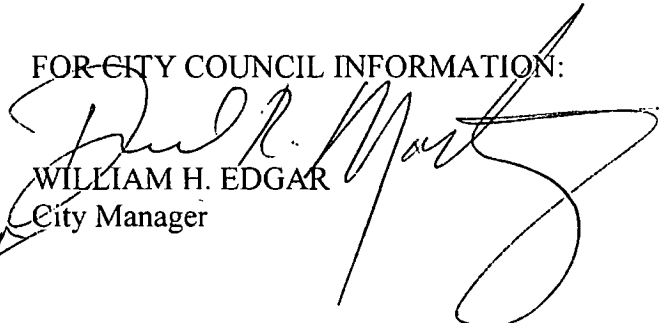
Since no goods or services are being purchased, MBE/WBE considerations are not applicable.

Respectfully Submitted,

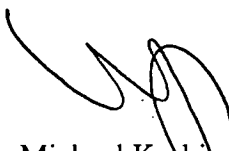


Reina J. Schwartz  
Manager, Solid Waste

FOR CITY COUNCIL INFORMATION:



WILLIAM H. EDGAR  
City Manager



Michael Kashiwagi  
Director of Public Works