



# Blueprints for Economic Development

A NEWSLETTER FOR COMMUNITY LEADERS FROM THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

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## Trash Is Everyone's Business

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The average person produces 4.5 pounds of trash per day. That is 135 pounds per month or 1,643 pounds per year. If proper collection and disposal services are not in place, that trash presents a real health and economic problem for rural communities.

Many normal household and business activities now involve a variety of chemicals that may injure the health of people, animals, the environment, or unborn children. To protect human health and the environment from pollution of our water supplies by dangerous chemicals, Congress passed the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Subtitle D of the RCRA pertains to the collection and disposal of solid waste (garbage) as well as the design, location, operation, and closure of landfills.

The implementation of Subtitle D in 1996 affected rural America and Oklahoma in a number of ways. Previously, many rural communities disposed of their trash by burning, burying, or dumping it in an open dump or pit. Today in Oklahoma, burning household trash is illegal in areas where collection services are available. Rural fire services respond to many fires that are the result of burning household trash. This problem poses a huge expense in time, equipment, and staff for the communities served by the rural fire departments. The many chemicals in household trash make burning trash an airborne health problem. Burying trash on your property is legal only if the trash is your own and no one else's. However, buried trash may serve as an expensive time bomb for any future generations that inherit the property. Lending institutions may not allow loans on land that has an open dump. In some states, no land may be sold if it includes dumps on the property.

Open dumps are usually low-lying areas that serve as conduits to water sources such as streams, rivers, or lakes. We now know that these valuable water sources often feed water supplies to individual homes or rural communities. Rain collects in the dumps and facilitates the transport of harmful chemicals to water supplies. Additionally, open dumps are breeding grounds for disease vectors such as mosquitoes, rats, and skunks.

### Oklahoma's Response

Before Subtitle D implementation, there were 140 dumps in Oklahoma (approximately 2 per county). Now

there are about 40 RCRA-approved landfills (approximately 1 per every 2 counties). The Oklahoma Legislature placed the responsibility of providing, operating, and maintaining solid waste (SW) collection and disposal services in the hands of the County Commissioners. Each county was mandated to produce a County Solid Waste Management (SWM) Plan by July 1, 1996. Planning guidelines developed by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service helped counties outline how they would address the following items:

1. Formation of a solid waste advisory committee.
2. Inventory of current solid waste services.
3. Evaluation of possible alternative systems.
4. Evaluation of organizational structures such as trusts, districts, etc.
5. Location and remediation of illegal dumps and outline a prevention plan.
6. Development of an educational plan for citizens.
7. Preparation of a county plan that addresses the above.

Since July 1996, a copy of each county's plan should be on file at the County Commissioner's office and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) Division of Land Protection (405-702-5100).

### Editor's Note

This newsletter provides current information on rural economic development issues facing Oklahoma leaders. The audience includes Cooperative Extension Service staff and others such as city or county officials/employees, chamber of commerce staff/members, and business/community leaders.

Published four times per year, *Blueprints* includes brief articles on rural economic development (for example, success stories or informational articles), a list of publications, videotapes and other educational materials, and announcements for future conferences and meetings. Suggestions for articles and announcements are welcome.

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Many counties now have SWM trust authorities and managers that oversee the SW services in their counties. Some counties have a sales tax devoted to operating these services. Some counties have joined together to form regional services.

Unfortunately, illegal dumping activities continue in many parts of Oklahoma. These dumps are eyesores and health problems. Illegal dumps reduce property values and the likelihood that businesses will want to locate in the area. The dumps may reduce tourism and fishing, as water quality may be affected. Lenders may refuse to loan money on property that has illegal dumps on it, as the liability issue may be great.

## Help For Communities

Funds are available from several sources to assist rural areas with their SW services. The ODEQ collects a tax on landfill tipping fees. A portion of that tax is available to

counties and is administered by the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma (ACCO). Frequently, the ACCO funds go to Environmental Enforcement Officer programs (trash cop) for the apprehension and prosecution of illegal dumpers and for cleaning up dumps.

Fenton Rood at the ODEQ can assist counties with the purchase of certain types of equipment, such as

chippers for tree limbs downed in ice storms. Susie Shields at ODEQ can also assist with educational materials and provide a list of funds for school programs. Kristi Rard at the state office of the USDA can provide information on rural utilities grants. A number of people with the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service can assist, as well. Assistance, fact sheets, videotapes, and other information are available from your county office personnel. OSU in Stillwater can assist communities with economic feasibility studies related to various SWM systems for your community. Also, OSU supports a web site about SWM issues at [www.rd.okstate.edu](http://www.rd.okstate.edu). Workshops and conferences are offered several times a year in the state. Check the OSU waste web site for conference dates and to keep informed.

*Please send your comments to Blueprints for Economic Development: 514 Agricultural Hall; Oklahoma State University; Stillwater, OK, 74078-0505. Phone (405) 744-9837. E-mail: [mdwoods@okstate.edu](mailto:mdwoods@okstate.edu).*



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