

Ann Arbor News "Your World" column submission for 2-22-05:

The following is an update on Michigan solid waste legislation being debated in this new session of Congress:

Senate Bill 158 is an amendment to Michigan's 1994 PA 451 (the "Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act") which would ban from incineration or landfilling:

- fluorescent lightbulbs
- cathode ray tubes (in TV's and computer monitors)
- most types of batteries except alkaline
- mercury-added products including thermostats, thermometers, and electrical switches.

Note that the items above are "recoverable." In other words, if they are recycled instead of trashed, their hazardous components can be removed and reused. This helps prevent pollution, and also reduces their need to be processed from virgin materials.

A related bill (SB 123) would also phase out the sale or the use of mercury containing blood pressure measuring devices. Both bills have been referred to the Natural Resources & Environmental Affairs Committee, of which Patricia Birkholz (R) is the Chair, and Liz Brater (D) is the Minority Vice Chair.

According to the Mercury Policy Project, the mercury pollution rate in the U.S. has resulted in fish consumption advisories for mercury in 40 states, and more than half of the mercury disposed annually into municipal solid waste nationally could be eliminated by phasing out the manufacture of non-essential mercury-added products (www.mercurypolicy.org).

Also being drafted is legislation which would add a surcharge for waste disposal in Michigan landfills. Proponents say the surcharge would reduce out-of-state waste by bringing the cost of landfilling in Michigan more in line with other states, therefore making Michigan landfills less of a magnet to out-of-state waste. They are hoping to repeat Pennsylvania's success, which reduced out-of-state trash by 14 percent, or 1.5 million tons, in the second year after it began charging waste companies \$7.25 per ton.

At current rates, a quarter of the proposed surcharge would be paid by out of state waste, because only 75% of the waste in Michigan landfills is generated here. This is compared to 1996, when 87% of our waste was our own. In the seven years from 1996 to 2003 the percentage of Canadian trash in our landfills more than doubled to 15%. We are now the nation's third largest importer of trash.

Supporters of a surcharge say that by making it more expensive to landfill, recycling rates will increase. Michigan's current recycling rate is last among Midwestern states, with just 20 percent of its waste being recycled. And the money raised would be returned to

municipalities to improve their recycling programs.

Some legislators also advocate tougher penalties for disposing of illegal items in landfills, and call for extending the ban on landfill expansion that is set to end Jan. 1, 2006.

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