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Neighboring States are Trashing Wisconsin

Data Indicates Out-of-State Waste Trend Will Continue if Tipping Fee is Not Increased

Madison –A map released today in anticipation of a hearing on a bill to increase the fees for garbage dumped in Wisconsin illustrates that garbage from neighboring states has found its way into landfills across the state. The data further indicates that neighboring states will continue to take advantage of Wisconsin's low tipping fees to ship waste into Wisconsin, which will put groundwater and communities at risk.

The map depicting the amount of out-of-state waste that entered Wisconsin in 2003 and 2004 illustrates how out-of-state waste is now criss-crossing the state due to easy access via highways. For example, Minnesota trash can be found in Milwaukee suburbs. Illinois trash is as far north as Dodge and Jefferson counties. Dane County has accepted waste from Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota. Washburn and Rusk counties have accepted waste all the way from Michigan.

According to Anne Sayers, Program Director for the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters, "Since 2003, there has been a 46 percent increase in the amount of out-of-state waste dumped into Wisconsin landfills. Wisconsin citizens are being unfairly saddled with the health and economic costs of dealing with 2.2 million tons of other people's garbage each year."

Citizens are gearing up to attend the out-of-state waste public hearing before the Assembly Natural Resources Committee on February 15th. At the hearing, citizens are expected to voice their support of an increased tipping fee by referencing the trends illustrated in the map released today and by citing the many benefits of reduced reliance on landfills.

Wisconsin is quickly becoming the dumping ground of the Midwest because of an exceptionally low tipping fee. Wisconsin charges only \$3 per ton of garbage dumped in a landfill, while neighboring states charge far more. Minnesota, for example, charges \$13 per ton.

"The map clearly indicates that neighboring states are using highway infrastructure to conveniently truck their garbage into Wisconsin landfills. They pay next to nothing to dump their garbage here, plus they leave it to Wisconsin tax payers to clean up and build

new landfills. It's a pretty sweet deal for our neighbors, but it literally stinks for Wisconsin," said Caryl Terrell, Chapter Director of the Sierra Club, John Muir Chapter.

As a solution, legislators have proposed a bill (AB 798) to increase the state's tipping fee by \$7 to a total of \$10. A recent UW-Green Bay study indicates that this increase would eliminate the economic incentive for long distance haulers and would likely result in a 50% decrease in the amount of out-of-state garbage entering Wisconsin.

The increased tipping fee proposal is quickly gaining traction with Wisconsin citizens who fear the health impacts and financial costs of more Wisconsin landfills. Citizens such as Jenifer Lugar of Saronia have now become very active in the fight to limit out-of-state waste, "I never considered myself to be very environmentally active, but the day I realized my drinking water was threatened by someone else's garbage, everything changed."

Landfills are known to contaminate air and drinking water supplies with pollutants such as cyanide, mercury, dioxins, and lead. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that even today's engineered landfills have a eight-two percent failure rate, posing a permanent threat to our groundwater supplies.

At the recent Conservation Lobby Day in Madison, Charlene Lemoine of the Waukesha County Environmental Action League joined more than 250 citizens from across the state in the capitol to ask state legislators to support the bill increasing tipping fees to \$10, "Citizens living near the Orchard Ridge Landfill in Menomonee Falls and the Emerald Park Landfill in Muskego watch, on a daily basis, as mountains of trash grow in their backyards. Legislators are obligated to citizens to take control of this situation before it is too late."

"We ask members of the Natural Resources Committee to support AB 798 and ask that they vote this important bill out of committee," said Jennifer Giegerich WISPIRG State Director. "We are running out of time in this legislative session to ensure that Wisconsin will not continue to be the dumping ground of the Midwest."

The public hearing on AB 798 is scheduled for Wednesday, February 15th at 10 am in 415 NW of the state Capitol. For more information, citizens may contact Anne Sayers at the Wisconsin League of Conservation at 608-661-0845.

An easy-to-download format of the out-of-state waste map is available at <http://www.conservationvoters.org/docs/pr/trash/>. For more information on solid waste, please see the Wisconsin Conservation Briefing Book 2005-2006 at <http://www.conservationvoters.org/brbk05/index.shtml>

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Wisconsin Solid Waste Facts

Reliance on landfills threatens human health by impairing air and water quality.

Landfills are the number one source of human-made methane, a critical greenhouse gas, as well as the source of “leachate,” a toxic liquid that will eventually seep into the groundwater under every landfill ever built. Leaky landfills contaminate air and drinking water supplies with pollutants like cyanide, mercury, dioxins, and lead. Even today’s “engineered” landfills have an 82 percent failure rate, posing a permanent threat to our ground water supplies.

Wisconsin’s influx of out-of-state waste is not likely to diminish in the future without an increased tipping fee.

Private trash haulers have ramped up capacity by more than 64 million tons as of January 2005 in anticipation of even greater volumes of out-of-state waste coming into Wisconsin landfills. Minnesota, for example, expects their own waste volumes to double from 5.9 million tons to 9.1 million tons in the next ten years. With few new landfills or expansions being approved in Minnesota, most of that additional waste will likely find its way into Wisconsin landfills. Illinois is also facing a landfill capacity crisis, with skyrocketing land values and strong community opposition for new landfill construction, which will place added pressure on Wisconsin’s landfill capacity.

Increased tipping fees will reduce out-of-state waste.

Importing municipal waste into Wisconsin is a bargain at present due to a combination of low tipping fees and plentiful landfill capacity. This effectively allows neighboring states to “offload” the environmental and financial liabilities of waste management, including some of their dirtiest waste, on Wisconsin communities. A more competitive tipping fee for waste disposal is the only constitutionally viable option left to counter an increasing flow of waste from neighboring states. According to a recent UW-Green Bay study, an increase in the tipping fee to \$10 per ton (\$7 more than the current fee) could provide a 50 percent reduction in out-of-state waste disposal. The increase would make Wisconsin’s tipping fee more competitive to other states, such as Minnesota (\$13/ton), eliminating the economic incentive for haulers to truck waste here.

Increased tipping fees will provide tax relief for Wisconsin citizens and growth for the state’s economy.

Currently, taxpayers are paying for nearly 72 percent of recycling programs through property taxes. A tipping fee increase from \$3 to \$10 on each ton of waste will generate an additional \$44-54 million in revenue. Nearly all of that additional revenue would go right back to local communities, fully funding local recycling programs that are currently being subsidized by property taxes. The tipping fee increase will reward communities that actively implement robust, innovative recycling programs and businesses with tax relief, increased job opportunities, and revenue from new reuse and resource recovery enterprises. It will also protect taxpayers from the looming costs attributed with cleaning up landfills in the years ahead.