

DATE: 10-25-11**COUNCIL ACTION FORM****SUBJECT: RESOURCE RECOVERY'S FREE DAY EVALUATION****BACKGROUND:**

In August 2011, Staff provided information outlining the impact Free Day events have on the Resource Recovery Plant (RRP). To recap the history and summarize that report, Free Days began on April 5, 1977 when the City Council took the following action:

"Moved by Stevens, seconded by Koerber, to designate April 23, 1977, as Clean-Up Day an National Keep America Beautiful Day, and that all car line and pick-up truck line charges at the solid waste plant be waived on that date."

Over the years since that initial day, Free Days have grown to include two regularly scheduled events each year (the fourth Saturday in April and the second Saturday in September). These two free days come at a time when Iowa State University students are moving in and out, resulting in tripling the volume of regular trash received at the RRP. In the 34 years of hosting Free Days, they have grown from just citizens with cars and pickups as originally approved by Council, to now include collection events held at contract communities, small businesses, apartment owners hauling their tenants' trash, and individuals that accumulate trash until the Free Day and then haul multiple loads to the RRP (as many as six trips in one day). It could now be argued that these uses are not promoting community-wide sustainability, and are possibly encouraging wastefulness rather than responsible stewardship.

Staffing for Free Days has doubled in order to reduce waiting times and provide the best possible customer service. In order to host a Free Day, staff must close the plant to commercial haulers two or three days prior to the event to ensure adequate space for the Free Day material. This results in excess of 300 tons of trash being diverted to the Boone County Landfill. Sending commercial haulers to the Boone County Landfill is a direct loss of revenue for the RRP, ranging from \$10,000 to \$12,000 per day in scale revenue. This does not include revenue from Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF) and ferrous or non-ferrous metal sales. These events also result in lost landfill space, which is an ongoing concern for Boone County. The financial impact on our RRP system of two Free Days a year has grown to over \$68,000, while these days are utilized by less than 1% of Story County's population.

In addition, when the RRP is closed our local trash haulers and their customers are also negatively impacted. Sending the haulers to the Boone County Landfill increases their cost by approximately \$100 per trip. This bypassing increases their liability and expenses due to additional miles driven, regular collection times are delayed for paying customers, and employee overtime expenses are increased. Closing the plant results in very poor customer service to our regular haulers, which translates into poor service to their customers and the citizens of Story County. **Staff has observed that many items citizens bring to Free Days for disposal are things that can be picked up by their regular hauling company for a reasonable fee or no additional fee at all.** Private hauling businesses have also been

observed making multiple trips through the drop-off line on Free Days. In summary, these actions actually result in the City being in direct competition with for-profit businesses, since the City does not charge for Free Day drop-off.

Environmentally, Free Days are directly contributing to greenhouse gases when the commercial haulers are diverted to Boone, increasing trucking/fuel mileage, as well as when these additional materials are landfilled and ultimately produce more methane. The community's carbon footprint is further amplified by having 600-800 vehicles idling in line with materials that could have been picked up at their homes by their regular haulers.

As directed by Council on August 23, 2011, staff gathered stakeholder input by hosting two open house-style public meetings on September 14 and 15, 2011. To enhance attendance and input at those meetings, invitations were sent to our contract communities and to involved community groups, in addition to focused media exposure. An article in *The Tribune* by Laura Millsaps explained in detail concerns of current Free Day operations prior to these public meetings and the most recent Free Day (this article is included in the attachments). Because initial response to these input opportunities was very low, staff extended the comment period for online users. With all these attempts, only eight comments were received (attached). Those include a lengthy comment from a local garbage service company explaining their losses relating to Free Day activities and other general comments from the public.

The public comments included suggestions that the Free Days could be spread out over a longer period of time, or that there be some form of ticket or voucher system might be used. Upon analysis, staff determined that those type of programs would not be feasible at current staffing levels, and could also foster a potential for fraud. Other comments suggested there should be more information about alternative ways to dispose or reuse discarded materials, such as through the Freecycle and Craigslist internet venues and through Goodwill, Salvation Army, and other charitable organizations.

Staff believes that additional public education and outreach programs to inform citizens of disposal or reuse options would be a valuable alternative to the current Free Days. To facilitate community-wide beautification efforts, the RRP will also continue to support such civic efforts as Stash the Trash and the Skunk River Navy.

ALTERNATIVES:

1. Authorize elimination of the semi-annual Free Days, and expand public education and outreach through advertising and community presentations. This would include actively pursuing presentation opportunities through Channel 12, at local community's city council meetings, plant tours for local schools and universities, Science Nights, area service groups and organizations, and promotion of alternative disposal options through Freecycle, Craigslist, Goodwill, Salvation Army, etc.
2. Direct staff to implement or explore other alternatives to existing Free Days, such as:

- a. Moving Free Days from current fourth Saturday in April and second Saturday in September to lower-tonnage periods during the year.
 - b. Scaling back to only one Free Day each year.
 - c. Update Free Days as originally approved to allow only *residential* car and pickup fees to be waived.
 - d. Update Free Days to allow only one trip per vehicle.
 - e. Eliminate off-site collection points.
 - f. Institute a lottery or rationing system to spread out those eligible for the service throughout the year.
3. Continue with the existing Free Day process.

MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Free Days are utilized by less than one percent of our service population, yet create a cumulative negative financial impact on the system of nearly \$70,000 per year. The impacts are also felt by the private haulers through lost revenues and the extra time and expense involved in diverting loads to the Boone County landfill. There are also several aspects of these days that do not support the Council's goal of promoting environmental sustainability. These include the fuel burned by idling vehicles waiting in line to utilize the service, the extra fuel used by local garbage trucks travelling to the Boone County landfill for several days, space being consumed at an accelerated rate at the landfill, and tacitly encouraging wastefulness rather than resource reuse. Further, other community-based efforts have developed since 1977 to address the need for a spring clean-up.

Staff actively sought input from RRP users, participating communities, and the private haulers, with only eight responses being received acknowledging the excessive costs and financial impact to private haulers.

It appears that the original purpose of Free Days was to assist in beautification efforts focused on a limited time period and geared to smaller loads from cars or pickups. Over time, these days have morphed into a quite different role. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative 1, thereby approving the elimination of Free Days. The elimination of this service is more palatable now that other services are available from the private sector to accommodate our customers. Under this recommendation, staff will commit to expand public education to our customers regarding these alternative services through advertising and community presentations.

Free Day Comments
Open House – Public Meetings
Wednesday, September 14, and Thursday, September 15, 2011

- Wally Loney, Mayor, McCallsburg: If Free Day was eliminated, it would be acceptable with him as mayor.
- Catherine Scott: Not just one day in the fall and spring; ticket or voucher system to spread out disposal. Work on educating on other ways to dispose of useful items. Half-price days – more of them – instead of just two free days.
- Free Day is an entitlement for a small part of our county's population. It should end and let everyone be responsible for the waste they generate.
- Have a voucher system with 2 free tickets per year. Tie it to the residence so it can't be passed around.
- Educate people on alternative ways to get rid of things such as Craigslist, Freecycle, etc.
- A lot of gas is wasted by people waiting in line.
- Overall concern that City is kept clean and as many things stay out of the waste stream as long as possible.
- Have discounted fees over a short period of time rather than one Free Day.
- Terry Lewis: I have been a user of free day at the waste plant in the past. I have not used it currently as wait times were too long or it didn't match with my schedule (this fall I was on vacation for the day). As I have a pickup, getting rid of waste myself is not a big issue. Most of the time, I have enough stuff to justify the \$22 fee to come to the plant. If not, I would use my carrier, Chitty Garbage. For demolition trash, I would haul to the site that closed in Ames or now would haul to Boone. In reading the August 2011 staff report, it appears that costs are going up and usage is going down as a percentage of county population. With less than 1% of the county population using the free days, it hardly seems worth the expense. I know the original free days were set to coincide with the "Keep America Beautiful Day", but it seems that users are not as concerned with that day anymore/. It would appear to me that most of the people in the county, and more specifically Ames, are using their packers or doing it themselves. Using the Spring numbers, if 620 people participated and the cost to the plant was \$52,412, that equals a cost per participant of \$84.54.

That cost hardly seems justified. If the usage rate in the county was more like 10 to 20% of the population, it would seem to be more justified from a resident standpoint but it still does not justify the \$52K expense. I would recommend the city cease the free days at the plant, continue the yard waste free days, and do a publicity campaign with the packers to inform the citizens of the county what the options are and the costs. If you have one couch and one TV, Chitty's costs are extremely reasonable. As we have such a transient population with ISU students turning over every year, it may also be advisable to have the landlords do more to tell their tenants what is acceptable to throw and what the charges will be. I really don't think that by eliminating the free garbage days, we will see an increase in trash on properties in the county.

- Beth and Larry Johnson: I read the article in the paper about the cost of the free drop off days costing so much. I never thought about the cost of lost revenue. I agree with you that it might be best to discontinue the free days. Something you might look at is encouraging people to use free listings like craigslist <http://ames.craigslist.org/> to give away unwanted items. I have used it to get rid of used pallets (they either fix them and sell them or use them for firewood, old computer monitors (someone was using them to make replicas of old video arcade games), and other items. As they say, one man's junk and another man's treasure. You might look at putting the suggestion in one of the city mailings.
- Mike Chitty's comments are attached.

The problems "FREE DAY" causes CHITTY GARBAGE SERVICE

- [A] Increased cost in transportation and collection :
 - [1] Average cost to the Boone landfill is \$ 100.00 per load
 - [2] Increased LIABILITY because of the extra miles and hours Spent on the city streets and county roads and highways.
 - [3] Increased traffic congestion - 20-40 loads per day to Boone
 - [4] Later collection times
 - [5] More trash trucks on the city streets later in the day
 - [6] Employee overtime
- [B] We are the transparent casualty's of the "FREE DAY" experience
 - [1] No one knows that we must drive to Boone , 20-40 times Per day, for three or four days prior to the "FREE DAY" and usually one or two days after. This is a very "REAL" expense and burden to our company and customers.
 - [2] The citizens in line at the "FREE DAY" don't like us, They believe that it's "FREE" for everyone
 - [3] The public doesn't know that the "FREE DAY" at the RRP is NOT free to Chitty Garbage, we pay the normal \$52.75 per ton. The average load for us on a "FREE DAY" Will cost us between \$200.00 and \$400.00 per load.
 - [4] All of the items that are brought to the RRP on "FREE DAY" are items that we would normally pick-up Some items in small quantities at no charge or a minimal Charge.

[1] EXAMPLE :

A	27" TV	\$ 5.00
B	Large Sofa	\$ 10.00
C	Box Spring	\$ 2.50
D	Mattress	\$ 2.50
E	Stuffed chair	\$ 5.00
D	Ect.	

Why should these items be stored for months, and be disposed of for "FREE" by the city of Ames, when the citizens that bought them have a personal responsibility to such items. They were able to spend hundreds of dollars for these items but when it's time to discard them properly they believe it's their "RIGHT" to dispose of it for "FREE". Why should they wait in line, and increase their carbon foot print on the world when all of the items in question can be disposed of or recycled inexpensively and efficiently by our company. If their current hauler can't or won't help them, they are "FREE" to call one that will. CHITTY GARBAGE is proud to help the community.

There is nothing that is "FREE" in life, it's just a hidden cost to someone else, the other group of citizens who have taken responsibility for there purchase's and actions. If "FREE DAY" was for a natural disaster that could benefit more than 1 percent of the population in a time of need, that might make sense for all, but not all the time.

Our company has proven over the years that we can handle this task. For a minimal charge we will and can remove all of the "Free day" ITEMS during the normal day's collection without overwhelming the RRP, Boone county landfill, city streets, or county roads or hi-ways. When "FREE" enterprise works, it stimulates the local economy, improves goods and services, and rewards company's that can get the job done efficiently and affordably.

If "FREE DAY" was reduced, limited or cancelled it could possibly strengthen our relationship [the city of Ames] with the Boone county landfill.

We have dumpsters, large and small for any task, from one time pick-up's to everything in between. The entire county has been and will be served to meet the needs of our citizens

By reducing or eliminating "FREE DAY" we can make better use of the diverted trash from the RRP during the days before and days after . The RRP keeps revenue coming in. The Boone landfill saves it's "air space." There would be less traffic on the highways and city streets, the carbon foot print will be reduced, the local business around the RRP will have a lot less stress, and all of the material that would have been brought to the RRP in two days a year, will be delivered over the course of the year.

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Free garbage disposal days not all that free for city

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By Laura Millsaps
Staff Writer

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The city of Ames' two annual free garbage disposal days in April and September are anticipated by many as a way to clean out that junky garage or get rid of that nasty old sofa.

But the events have grown, both in the number of people participating and the amount of trash dumped, to the point the events are anything but free, and officials at the Ames Resource Recovery Plant are asking the Ames City Council to reconsider the wisdom of hosting them.

Over the past 11 years, the number of participants has doubled, to more than 620 in one day. The largest percentage of what they bring, carpet, mattresses, furniture and other bulky items, make emptying the tipping room floor in advance a must. Extra staff is brought in to handle the traffic, which can frequently stretch down the street as people wait in line.

In April, the price tag for one day of free disposal was \$52,412, which included labor, additional landfill expenses, and lost revenue from commercial tipping fees, refuse-derived fuel and metal sales.

The Resource Recovery Plant operations are also subsidized by a per capita charge of \$10.50 to participating communities, and about 80 cents of that is used to cover the costs of these events. Less than 1 percent of the population served by plant operations participates in the free garbage disposal days.

In order to prepare for the event, it is often necessary close the plant for two to three days to clear the floor just to have room for the waste accumulated during the event. This means turning away commercial haulers, who pay tipping fees to the plant, a major source of revenue in the Resource Recovery Plant's \$3.6 million annual budget.

"We can lose between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a day in revenue from tipping fees," Resource Recovery Assistant Superintendent Gary Freel said, "and we have to ask commercial haulers, the people who are our regular daily customers, to divert their loads to the Boone County Landfill. It adds a couple of hours or more to their work days. It adds to their labor and transportation costs. These events end up creating a huge inconvenience to them."

Mike Chitty, president of Chitty Garbage Service, said, "Yes, it's true, these are not our favorite times of the year."

Chitty said the diversions cost his company about \$100 per garbage hauler trip and affect the productivity of their vehicles and employees because of the lengthier transportation time.

"We basically get punished for an event that takes items we accept on any normal day of the year," Chitty said.

John Pohlman, resource superintendent for the plant, presented the Ames City Council with details of the increased costs and logistical problems in a staff report Aug. 9, and will be holding two public



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By Amy Vinchattle/Ames Tribune
Robert Weidner, lead operator at the Resource Recovery Center, sorts material Thursday.

meetings next week.

"We've done as much as we can to streamline this process," Pohlman said, "but with the costs, the staffing and the traffic concerns, we think it's time for the council to take another look at these events, whether we should be doing them differently or not at all."

Free Trash Disposal Day at the Ames Resource Recovery plant has been around for a long time, going back to a council decision in 1977 to coordinate a community cleanup event in honor of the national Keep America Beautiful campaign.

In the 1980s, it grew to being a once-a-month event from May to September, but Pohlman said it encouraged some people to skip contracting with a garbage handler for regular trash service altogether.

"They would bring their regular household garbage to us once a month during the warm weather months," he said, "and essentially stockpile or hoard their garbage all winter long. And I can tell you we didn't much appreciate that."

The event went to twice a year in 1992.

Freel said that free disposal days might not be the best way to get rid of items, especially if it is just one or two things.

"It's not uncommon to see a person drive their car to a free day and idle in traffic just to throw away a single computer monitor, something they might very well have been able to put in their regular household trash," he said.

That's not necessarily very convenient, said Freel, and from an environmental standpoint it's not the best decision.

"While we've done our best to organize this process so people aren't waiting unreasonable amounts of time," Freel said, "all the vehicles idling does have an environmental impact as well, and if they can get rid of the item through their regular trash handler, they might not need to waste their time or gas."

People end up paying for disposal for certain items anyway, Pohlman said. The Resource Recovery plant doesn't make exceptions to its usual fees on those days. It still doesn't take construction debris or yard waste, and disposal charges for things like tires (up to \$38 depending on tire size) or appliances (\$20 per item) still apply.

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Public meetings for free disposal days

The City of Ames Resource Recovery Plant is holding two public input meetings to consider changes to the two annual "Free Days" offered at the facility. Waste haulers, contract communities, residential customers and other interested parties are encouraged to share their thoughts either from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 14, in City Hall, Room 235, or from 7 to 9:30 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 15, at the Resource Recovery Plant, 110 Center Ave.

Garbage Free Day Saturday

The City of Ames' annual fall Garbage Free Day will be held from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 10, at the Resource Recovery Plant, 110 Center Ave. The event is for Ames and other Story County residents.

Garbage Free Day is for disposal of regular household waste, furniture, carpet, and lawn mowers along with a limit of two personal TVs or computers. Participants should enter the facility from Duff Avenue to Second Street, not Lincoln Way. Regular charges will still be in effect for several items. A list is available on the City of Ames Web site at www.cityofames.org/index.aspx?page=169.