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Reduce waste today through innovative resource management.
Reach a waste-free tomorrow by demonstrating that waste is preventable not inevitable.

November 4, 2002

On November 19, 2002, Ramsey County will hold a public hearing regarding a proposal to change the way the county collects taxes to pay for garbage disposal. Under the proposal, the Waste Management Service Charge, which is currently billed on Ramsey County property tax statements, would be renamed the County Environmental Charge and collected directly from the waste hauler. The charge would appear as a fee on residents' garbage bills, and the Waste Management Service Charge would be removed from property tax statements.

The money now collected through the Waste Management Service Charge is primarily used to offset the costs of managing waste at the NRG Resource Recovery Facility in Newport, MN, where waste is processed into a fuel suitable for incineration. Under a contract with NRG, the county is required to deliver waste to the Newport facility through 2007. The cost of using the facility is approximately \$68 per ton. The cost of landfilling is approximately \$38 per ton. As a result, the county must subsidize disposal costs at Newport to remain competitive with landfilling.

The size of the County Environmental Charge would be based on the amount of garbage generated, and would range from \$32.78 for homeowners with small amounts of trash to several thousand dollars for the largest commercial generators. For most homeowners the charge will be equal to or less than the current \$50.98 assessment on their property tax bills. Renters, on the other hand, who have not had to pay the fee through property taxes, will be faced with a new charge on their garbage bill.

Eureka Recycling supports this change for two reasons. First, moving the fee to the garbage bill makes the cost of disposal more visible. When residents see the charge on their garbage bill rather than on their property tax statement, they are more likely to associate it directly with the cost of trash. A greater awareness of the cost of disposal is likely to spur increased recycling and waste reduction efforts. Residents in Saint Paul are already avid recyclers because they understand the burden that trash places on the environment. The new fee system could motivate those residents and businesses that still lag behind in recycling, because they will be able to reduce their disposal costs by producing less trash. Waste reduction, including recycling, is the only way to avoid the economic and environmental costs associated with both landfilling and incineration.

Secondly, Eureka Recycling supports the switch to the County Environmental Charge because it distributes the costs of disposal more fairly, since it is assessed according to the amount of garbage produced. In the past, all homeowners paid the same average fee, but under the proposed changes those who generate less trash will pay a lower fee.

Nevertheless, the new system is not without its challenges. Renters who are responsible for their own trash bill, but whose property owners have been paying the Waste Management Service Charge through property taxes, will be faced with a new charge on their garbage bill. Some commercial property renters and owners, because they are the largest generators of trash, will see rather large increases in the fee.

If the County Environmental Charge is implemented, Ramsey County will be publicizing the change through public announcements and education pieces after the New Year. In addition, a notice would be included in garbage bills in March or April. Eureka Recycling will continue to inform you on this issue as the process advances. Our hotline, which answers questions from Ramsey County residents related to recycling, waste and toxicity reduction, household hazardous waste, yard waste and proper management of residential waste, has also fielded calls related to the Waste Management Service Charge. Depending on the outcome of the final resolution, it is likely we will answer calls related to the new fee structure through Ramsey County's Waste Reduction Hotline, (651) 633-EASY.

Residents and businesses who wish to learn more or have concerns about the County Environmental Charge proposal are encouraged to attend the public hearing on November 19. Citizens can also voice their opinion by calling the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners at (651) 266-8350. Finally, if you have questions, you can contact us at (651) 222-7678 or Ramsey County staff directly at (651) 773-4466.

Sincerely,

Dianna Kennedy
Communications Manager