

Treating the waste problem

Analysis by Jim McElgunn

If you were a farmer or manufacturer with a few hundred kilograms of highly dangerous chemical waste on your property, how would you get rid of it?

In some American states, for a small fee you could pay someone with a tanker truck to "take the problem off your hands." For liquid wastes, this often means the helpful trucker will drive on a highway at 60 miles per hour, open the valve on the tank and let the waste leak out.

According to one trucker, "the rule of thumb is: if the tires on the car behind you are melting, you're letting it out too fast."

In Alberta, even the most common disposal methods - such as leaving waste in a municipal dump - are damaging to the environment. Every time it rains, the chemicals in the dump leach through the soil, ending up in rivers and ultimately in the food chain. Simply put, at present there are no good, inexpensive ways to dispose of many hazardous wastes produced in Alberta.

This is where the long-awaited report of the Hazardous Waste Management Committee of the Environment Council of Alberta (ECA) comes in. Released Friday, it makes a series of recommendations for establishing a centrally-coordinated waste management system.

Fortunately, according to committee chairperson and U of A zoology professor J. Ralph Nursall, "we're not yet so industrialized that we are drowning in our wastes."

But, even now, thousands of tonnes of hazardous wastes are disposed of in unsafe ways every year. Ignorance of the magnitude of the problem is extreme - the committee estimate of the amount of hazardous waste generated in Alberta is somewhere between 21,000 and 180,000 tonnes per year.

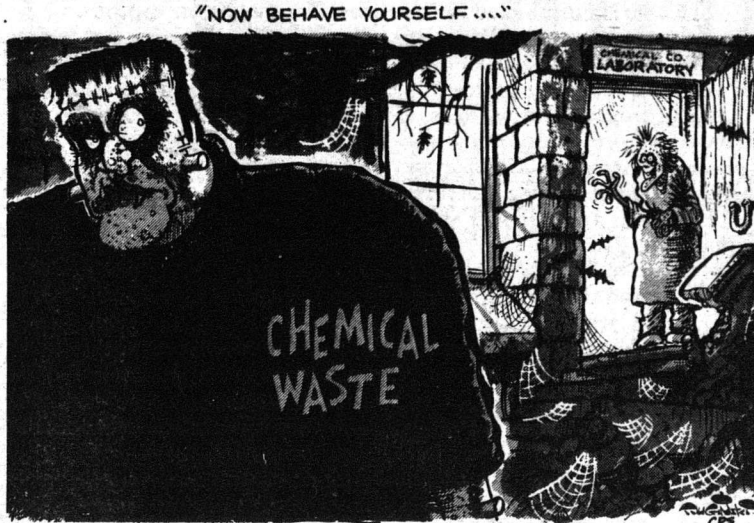
And the problem is growing fast.

By 1985, large numbers of new petrochemical plants will be operating in and around Edmonton and Red Deer; these will add

oooooooooooooooooooo

1. Mike Liut, St. Louis, 32
2. Nine players. Simmer, Gare, Stoughton, Dionne, Gretzky, Bossy, Lafleur, Larouche, Leach.
3. Colin Campbell, 196
4. Mark Messier in a 3-2 overtime playoff loss to Philadelphia.
5. Hank Aaron
6. Cy Young
7. Brooks Robinson
8. Tom Flores
9. John Havlicek
10. Milwaukee Bucks, Lew Alcindor

oooooooooooooooooooo



greatly to the amount of hazardous wastes generated. Refineries, oil sands plants, chemical plants, farms, factories - all will add their share to the burden.

The committee has therefore recommended the Alberta government make sweeping changes in provincial legislation. They suggest:

- Regulation for all chemical waste be under one piece of legislation rather than under several ministries and agencies.

- A crown corporation be established to operate the hazardous waste management system.

- Two treatment plants be built, the larger near Edmonton and the smaller near Calgary.

- A site selection committee be established to hold public hearings and pick a site, subject to criteria regarding physical characteristics and public acceptability.

- An Environment Trust Fund be created to pay for cleaning up spills, abandoned sites and unexpected hazards.

- The system be operating by 1985. Collection and transportation to the plants would be handled by the private sector, the treatment and disposal by the

crown corporation. - Each generator of hazardous waste have free use of the system for the first 2000 kilograms of material sent to the plants per year.

- Manifests (sworn declarations) be required by law from all hazardous waste generators. In these manifests, they would have to state the amounts and types of hazardous wastes they produce.

- The system be regulated by the Environment Protection Services of Alberta Environment, at arms' length from the crown corporation.

- Alberta enter into agreements with other western provinces and the federal government to exchange wastes. Under such a deal, different provinces might agree to specialize in disposing of different types of wastes.

These proposals, if adopted, would put Alberta far ahead of all other provinces in hazardous waste management. But will they be adopted?

The government's track record on environment issues is hardly inspiring.

In 1975, it ignored reports saying that Syncrude and other

proposed oil sands plants would create a huge acid rain problem in northeastern Alberta and northwestern Saskatchewan.

In 1977, it replaced the Environment Conservation Authority with the Environment Council of Alberta because it was too critical of the government's handling of the Red Deer dam project.

In 1980, it appointed a committee to study a massive scheme to transfer water from Northern to Southern Alberta, despite expected costs in the billions of dollars and probably heavy environmental damage.

It has given increasing signs that it is willing to open up Wilmore Wilderness Park - Alberta's last remaining untouched mountain area - to tourist development. Similar plans are being considered to develop the east slopes of the Rockies along the highway corridor west of Rocky Mountain House.

And in 1979, the government sparked a public outcry when Environment Minister Jack B. Cookson said he favored a proposal from Kinetic Contaminants to build a hazardous waste facility for all of Western Canada near Fort Saskatchewan. Many people feared managers of a privately-run disposal center would cut corners to maximize profits.

As the ECA report says of the

public hearings, "Cynicism and distrust... surfaced repeatedly... There is a feeling that growth and industrial development are the most important objectives of the government and the environment will be protected only to the extent that it will not impede development."

"Council hopes that this is not an accurate reflection of the government's attitude," it adds.

Is it?

Given the government's frequent lack of concern for the environment and its reluctance to impose new regulations on business, the probability that it will adopt the report in total seems low. But the recommendations do have their attractiveness for the government: they promise to rationalize tasks currently spread among half a dozen government departments and at least partly to solve a growing health hazard at a reasonable cost to businessmen and consumers.

And it's good public relations.

Citizen input may very well make the difference. The government has shown in the past that it will put aside its ideological objections to extensive government regulation if it perceives a strong enough popular demand for it.

So the next step is up to the public.

SIDETRACK

10333 - 112 St.

Now taking applications for full & part-time positions.

Jan. 28 - Feb. 3 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Waitresses, Bartenders, First Cook and Kitchen Help, Bus People, Hostesses and Door Men

Day and night work.

boogie!

saturday night is cabaret night in dinwoodie

THIS WEEK WIZZARD LAKE

Doors at 8
Adm: \$3.50 adv. (HUB Mall)
\$4 Door



Change of hours at RUTHERFORD HOUSE

11153 Saskatchewan Drive

WEEKDAYS - 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS - noon to 6:00 p.m.

In 1911 Alexander Cameron Rutherford, Alberta's first premier and founder of the University of Alberta, built this stately mansion. You can almost see a graduating class seated on the central oak staircase listening to Rutherford's address, an occasion that came to be called the Founder's Day Tea.

Furnished and restored to its original beauty, Rutherford House now rests on the modern campus of the University of Alberta, an enduring legacy from another era.

You will enjoy a visit to this historic home.

FREE ADMISSION

Alberta
CULTURE
Historic Sites