



PRESS-REGISTER

Cities search for landfill alternatives

With storm season near, debris removal, storage a concern

Friday, June 01, 2007

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Staff Reporter

DAPHNE -- As hurricane season approaches, vegetative landfills fill up and environmental regulations prohibit the burning of debris, city officials search for alternative methods to get rid of wood.

Common practices for disposing of vegetative debris, such as brush, leaves, tree limbs and trunks, are to bury it in landfills or burn it.

But the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has guidelines against wood burning at certain times of the year.

Ron Gore, head of the air division for the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, said burning is not allowed during the summer months to protect air quality.

Gore said that some illegal burning still occurs.

"It's completely illegal and has been for 30 years," Gore said.

With hurricane season beginning today, debris removal becomes an issue. After Hurricane Ivan, reports show, Baldwin County landfills charged about \$1.5 million for debris brought in by Baldwin cities or their contractors.

In Fairhope, according to Mayor Tim Kant, officials are trying to designate a tract along Section Street, north of Twin Beech Road, as a storage spot for vegetative debris.

The city currently stores leaves and brush in a location nearby, but Kant said that the city could be out of space there in about two years.

Furthermore, Kant said, if a big storm hits, "We probably wouldn't have enough space."

After Hurricane Katrina, Kant said, the city worked with a local farmer to take debris to his land and burn it.

Kant said that if the city ran out of space to store vegetative debris, they would have three options: burning it, hauling it off or grinding.

"And I don't think the citizens of Fairhope would be too pleased to learn that we were burning our tree limbs," Kant said.

Kant said that six or seven years ago, city officials looked into purchasing a grinder, but "the cost of a grinder was so expensive, we decided not to go in that direction."

Other cities have also looked at purchasing grinders, but because of cost, an independent company is sometimes hired.

Spotswood's Tree Service in Daphne is one that operates a "tree recycling" service. That involves bringing in brush, grass clippings, leaves or tree trimmings and trunks and running that debris through a 1,000-horsepower grinder. The mulch can then be used for different purposes, such as landscaping or fueling boilers.

Jonathan Spotswood, the owner of the facility, said his company sends mulch to run boilers at Kimberly-Clarke Corp. facilities.

Spotswood said he has been working with Daphne Mayor Fred Small to provide that city with grinding service. Small said that occasionally the city will hire someone and has also borrowed a wood chipper from the county.

Spotswood said that before he ground debris, he relied on wood dumps and landfills, which eventually became too expensive. So, he said, about a year ago, he invested about \$500,000 to purchase the big tree grinder.

Spotswood said he will also grind debris for residents for \$2 per cubic yard, about the same price a landfill charges to bury the wood. The company has a \$10 minimum, he said.

"We provide an alternative that is environmentally conscious," he said. Spotswood said he thinks that, eventually, cities in Baldwin County will have to rely on grinding to dispose of their trees and brush.

"It's only a matter of time before the EPA steps in," Spotswood said. "The landfills are filling up."

Small said that during storm cleanup, the city uses a contractor to remove debris. The contractor will usually

grind the debris into mulch.

He said the city recently awarded a debris-removal contract to IED Inc. for this hurricane season. Crowder-Gulf Inc., reports show, cleaned up the city after hurricanes Ivan and Katrina.

Small said the city has looked into purchasing its own grinder for debris disposal.

"We've thought about it," Small said. "You're talking about a very expensive piece of equipment."

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/CUT/3/CPAUL KNIGHT /RegisterA 1,000-horsepower tree grinder at Spotswood's Tree Service in Daphne turns brush into mulch. The company operates a "tree recycling" service that involves bringing in brush, grass clippings, leaves or tree trimmings and trunks and running that debris through the grinder. The mulch can then be used for different purposes, such as landscaping or fueling boilers.

/CUT/1/CPAUL KNIGHT /RegisterA backhoe loads brush into a tree grinder to be turned into mulch at Spotswood's Tree Service in Daphne. Jonathan Spotswood, the facility's owner, said grinding trees is a form of recycling and offers an alternative to operating landfills or burning vegetative debris.

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