

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT FEE ASSESSED ON PROPERTY TAXES IN WADENA COUNTY

“What is it and why do I have to pay it?”

Several years ago Minnesota Legislature asked the counties to find new uses for the solid waste generated in the counties. They directed the counties to implement programs for recycling items like cardboard, glass, plastic, tin, and aluminum. They directed the counties to provide a compost site for lawn clippings and rakings. They directed us to provide a source for appliance and electronics recycling, as well as tire collection. Since that time, Wadena County has implemented these programs but at a cost. Some of which is derived from the fee that you see on your tax statement. The services mentioned above are paid for partially from the Solid Waste Assessment Fee and partially from a nominal charge for items like appliances, electronics, and tires.

Most all of the townships, the City of Aldrich and the City of Nimrod, have locations available for recyclable materials to be left by the residents of the township and the waste haulers in each of the other cities provide curbside collection of recyclable material to their customers on certain days of the month. Those materials, when collected, are transported to the County Recycling Center where they are processed and transported on to various recycling facilities that use the material in other products/packaging.

Household appliances and electronic equipment are problem materials that need to be handled in an environmentally friendly manner. The County has a program in place at the County Transfer Station where residents of the County may dispose of these problem materials for a nominal fee of \$5.00 per appliance & electronic except televisions over 19” which are \$10.00 and large (floor standing) copier/printers which are \$20.00. This fee helps to cover the cost of transportation and disposal of the materials from the Transfer Station to a location where they are properly stripped of any hazardous material and recycled. Tires can be disposed of at the Transfer Station in the same manner. A nominal fee is charged that may vary depending on the size of tire being brought in for disposal.

Beyond the programs mentioned above, the County is obligated to dispose of the household and commercial garbage generated in the County in an environmentally friendly manner. In 1986, Wadena County became a part of a Joint Powers Agreement with other area counties that supported incineration of their waste at the Quadrant Waste To Energy facility located in Perham, MN, with unacceptable waste then being transported to the Dakota Landfill in Gwinner, ND. Quadrant was able to turn our garbage into steam that was sold to Tuffey’s and to Land O’Lakes to power their facilities. In the late 1990’s, Quadrant was shut down for air quality reasons and the facility sat dormant until 2001 when the City of Perham, in a joint effort with the Counties of Wadena, Ottertail, Todd, who signed 20 year waste agreements with the City, and Stearns County with the Tri-County Solid Waste group, managed to retrofit the facility and open its doors for incineration once again as the Perham Resource Recovery Facility. Originally, the tip fee (incineration fee) was projected to be \$49.00 per ton with a small adjustment being made each year to accommodate cost of living increases. The plan was to keep the tip fee low by selling electricity to Ottertail Power, while still selling steam to Tuffey’s and Land O’Lakes. Unfortunately, the promises for revenue generated from electricity did not turn out to be true and Land O’Lakes did not reopen its doors until it was later sold to Bongard’s Creameries and came on line with the Perham Resource Recovery Facility in the spring of 2004. In addition, many mishaps and operational problems forced the tipping fee from its original \$49.00 to its present rate of \$77.00 per ton, with each of the Counties also contributing to cover budget shortfalls at the end of each year since the facility reopened. The fee assessed on your property tax statement helps to cover the cost of the disposal fee at the Perham Resource Recovery Facility as well as the transportation cost to the facility. It also helps to pay the transportation and disposal fee necessary to dispose of waste in a lined landfill that cannot be incinerated.

On your property tax statement, you will note that a code is listed as either 80001 or 80002. The number code 80001 is the code used for parcels that have a residence on it (the residence does not have to be occupied, only inhabitable) or a vacant commercial building. On these parcels, a minimum assessment of \$50.00 is attached. The number code 80002 is for commercial businesses that are also operational. These properties are assessed by the tons of waste produced during the year. The assessment is calculated by assessing a \$35.00 fee for the first ton of waste produced and an additional \$30.00 for each ton of waste generated after that. The fee for the first ton commercial waste is less than the residential fee because the county does not offer recycling programs to the commercial industry. They are encouraged to develop their own ways to reduce waste generated but must pay the entire cost from their own revenues.

This fee does not cover fees for waste haulers to pick up your garbage from your home. That is a separate fee for the service they provide you. This fee also does not allow you to bring your garbage to the transfer station and dispose of it for free and it is subject to change by resolution of the Wadena County Board of Commissioners, should the need arise.

In short, the Solid Waste Special Assessment you pay on your property taxes assists the County in managing the solid waste produced in the county in various ways environmentally friendly ways from recycling to incineration and in accordance with the direction of the State of Minnesota.