

# ENVIRONMENTAL SYNOPSIS

## The Chairman's Corner

Rep. Scott E. Hutchinson, Chairman



Here are two questions to ponder. Should mandatory trash collection be in Pennsylvania's future? And, would Pennsylvanians support mandatory trash collection?

The knee jerk response to both questions would probably be no, since the state has never had a system of mandatory collection. And, Pennsylvanians have found a sizable number of diverse methods

— some of them legal - to dispose of their trash when there is no trash collection system in their community.

But, according to the results of the 2008 Mansfield University Statewide Survey, mandatory trash collection across the state may not be so farfetched, and we should not be so quick — to use a bad pun — to relegate the idea to the scrap heap. In fact, the survey says there is widespread support for mandatory trash collection.

That is just one of the findings from responses to a series of questions regarding trash collection practices in Pennsylvania posed by the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee (Committee) in the annual statewide telephone survey conducted by Mansfield University. The Mansfield University Statewide Survey has been conducted annually since 1990, and the Committee has historically sponsored a series of environmental questions as part of the survey. This year was no exception and the survey polled 794 Pennsylvanians on their views on several facets of trash collection and illegal dumping. The complete results of the 2008 survey can be found on pages 3 – 6, but I'd like to offer some background, a brief review and some observations about the responses here.

Before returning to the question about mandatory trash collection, the idea for the questions sponsored by the Committee this year came about as the result of meetings and discussions with a diverse group which included the departments of Environmental Protection and Community and Economic Development, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, PA CleanWays and the Professional Recyclers of Pennsylvania.

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### The Mansfield State Survey

The Mansfield State Survey is an annual statewide telephone survey of randomly selected Pennsylvania adults, which focuses upon issues facing the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The Committee has sponsored a series of environmental questions for a number of years.

A total of 794 Pennsylvanians were contacted for the 2008 survey. Respondents are proportionately represented in terms of geographical regions, sex and political party preference within the state to ensure an accurate sample. The margin of error in the 2008 survey is plus or minus 3.2 percent.

The 2008 survey was conducted under the direction of Mansfield University Professor of Sociology Dr. Timothy Madigan, PhD.

# SURVEY SHORTHAND SUMMARY

## *Trash Collection Survey Results in Brief* By the Numbers...



**92.5 percent - Have trash collection service now.**

**Of that 92.5 percent...**

- 64.9 percent - Service is mandatory.
- 87.7 percent - Have curbside service.
- 64.9 percent - Service includes removal of bulky household items.
- 77.1 percent - Have curbside collection of recyclables.
- 64.1 percent - Have curbside collection of yard waste.
- 88.2 percent - Satisfied with their service.



**Payment options vary but...**

- 29.6 percent - Pay local government to collect and dispose of their trash.
- 28.9 percent - Pay private haulers they contract with on their own.



**Of those who do not have trash collection services now...**

- 32.6 percent - Burn their trash.
- 23.9 percent - Take their trash to a convenient dumpster or receptacle.



**If trash collection services were offered...**

- 32.4 percent - Would pay \$10 a month.
- 31.7 percent - Would want trash collection for free.
- 48.6 percent - Would prefer a monthly bill.



**40.2 percent - Local government should be ultimately responsible for collection, transport and disposal of trash.**

**77 percent - Their communities have no illegal dumping problems.**

**Of those who felt there was an illegal dumping problem...**

- 23.8 percent - Blame the problem on lack of enforcement.
- 65.1 percent - Have seen illegal trash dumping in their area.



**Of those who have seen illegal dumping...**

- 35.4 percent - Bulky household items (appliances, furniture) represent the biggest problem area.

**39.9 percent - Roadside litter is the biggest trash problem in their community.**



**76.8 percent - Support mandatory trash collection in all PA municipalities in order to combat illegal dumping.**

# SURVEY RESULTS

## *The Mansfield University Statewide Survey - 2008* *Solid Waste Collection and Disposal Issues*

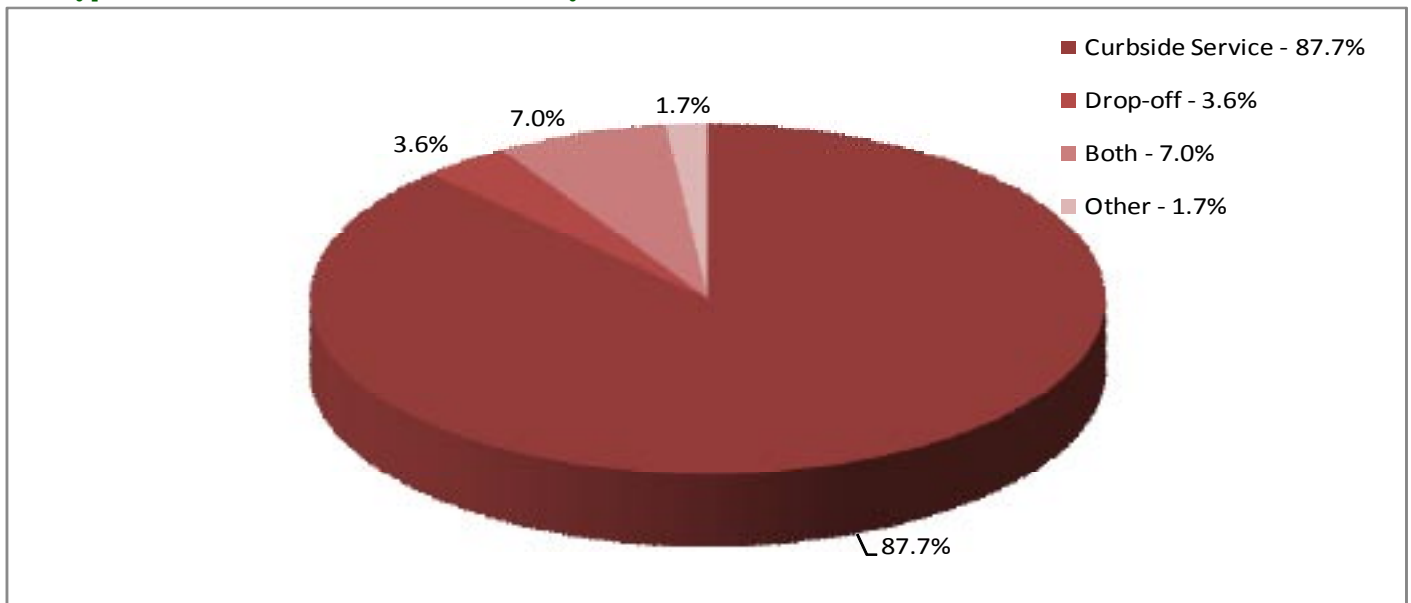
To learn more about what Pennsylvanians are thinking about the environment, the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee (Committee) again commissioned a series of questions through the Mansfield University Statewide Survey 2008, an annual statewide telephone survey. This year, the committee's questions concerned solid waste collection and disposal issues, to include illegal dumping. The results of the survey are found on pages 2-6. Read the "Chairman's Corner" on page one for some thoughts and comments on the survey's results, and page 2 for the "Shorthand Summary" version of the survey results.

### **I. Trash Collection Services in PA...What's Out There?**

While there are households out there without trash collection services, 92.5 percent of those responding report that they do have trash collection services. Of those households, 64.9 percent report that participation in trash collection is mandatory, and an identical percentage says that service includes removal of bulky household items (like appliances and furniture). Meanwhile, 77.1 percent report that service includes curbside collection of recyclables and 64.1 percent have curbside collection of yard waste.

It is interesting to note what types of trash collection service are offered. As the chart below depicts, curbside service is by far the most prevalent (87.7 percent), but both drop-off service and a combination of both are also found in the marketplace.

#### **What type of trash collection services do you have?**



### **II. Satisfaction Guaranteed?**

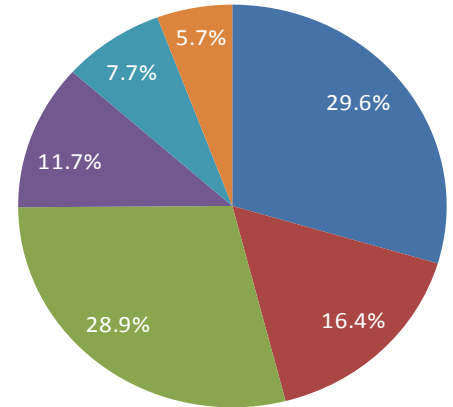
Most individuals (88.2 percent) are satisfied with their trash collection service, with most (62.9 percent) being very satisfied and 25.3 percent somewhat satisfied. Only 2.8 percent are very dissatisfied, 6.4 percent somewhat dissatisfied and 2.7 percent neutral. In an interesting cross tabulation, the results show that urban areas of the state are more satisfied with service than rural areas by a margin of 12.6 percent. Ironically, the Northeast region of the state has the lowest percentage of those "very satisfied" with their trash collection services (46.6 percent, which is 6.7 percent lower than the next closest region and 18-20 percent lower than all other regions), but when you combine "somewhat satisfied" with "very satisfied", the Northeast has the highest satisfaction percentage of all (89.7 percent).

### III. Show Me the Money

Payment methods for trash collection services vary widely across the state and the payment method also speaks to who actually collects the trash. Some pay local government and local government collects, but some pay local government which then hires a private hauler to collect. Some households contract with and pay a private hauler on their own, while some pay a private hauler but it is one contracted by local government. Some people claim to not know how they pay for trash collection and others have some "other" method of payment.

#### Which of the following most accurately describes how you pay for trash collection services?

- I pay my local government and my local government collects and disposes of my trash – 29.6%
- I pay my local government, but local government hires a private hauler – 16.4%
- I pay a private hauler that I contract with on my own – 28.9%
- I pay a private hauler, but my local government contracts with the private hauler – 11.7%
- I don't know how I pay for trash collection – 7.7%



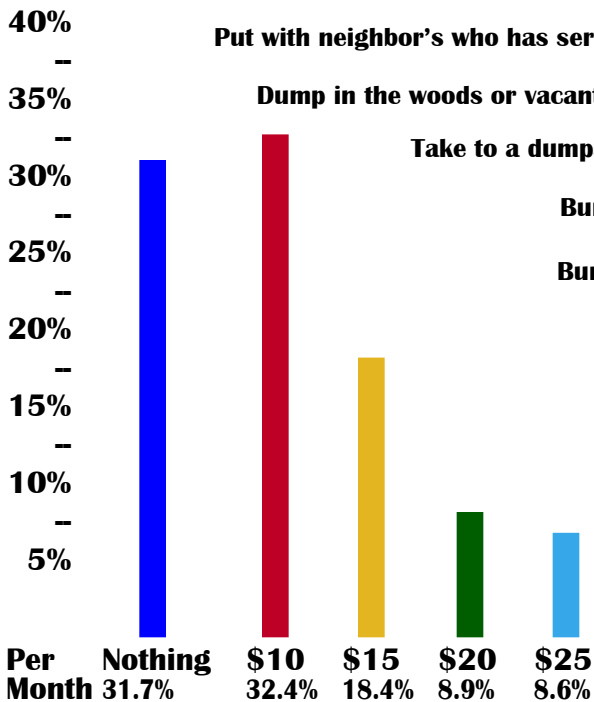
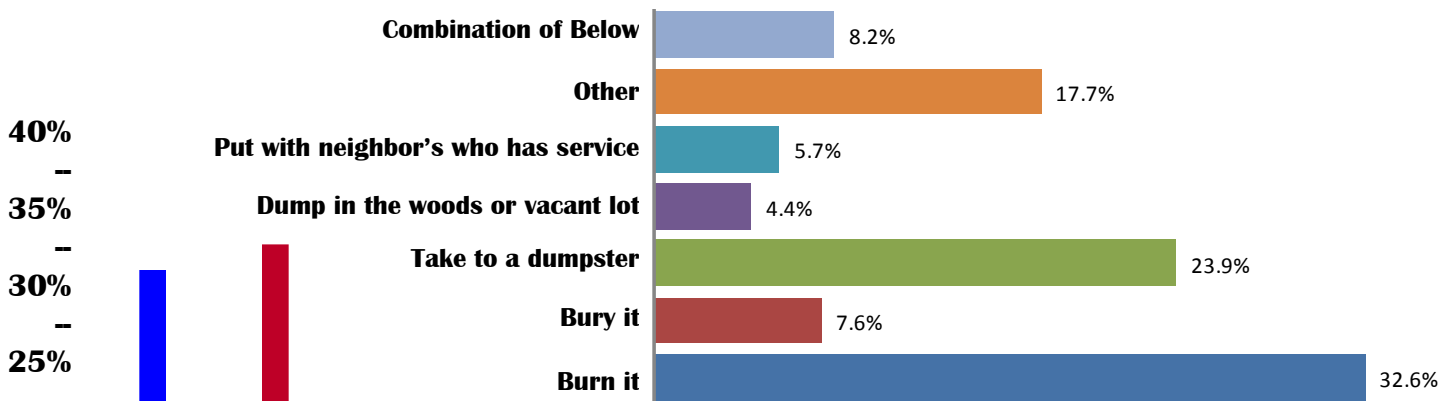
### IV. What If...I Don't Have Trash Collection Service?

There are several methods of trash disposal that individuals in Pennsylvania use if they do not have trash collection services. They are listed in the first chart below.

The second chart shows what individuals would be willing to pay if trash collection service was to be made available. Surprisingly, paying nothing was not the number one answer...but it was close.

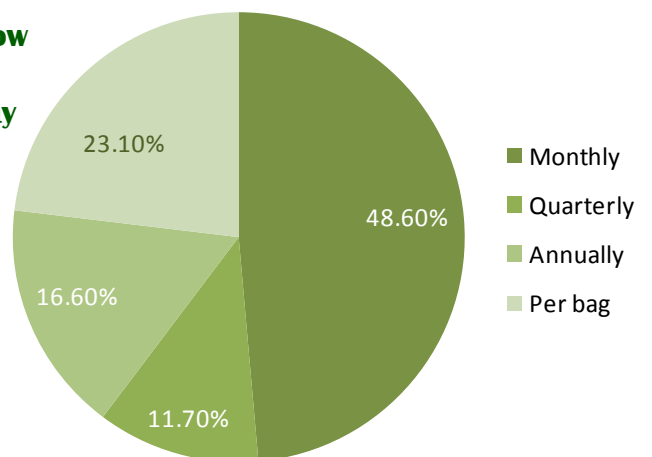
The third chart depicts how people would prefer to pay for trash collection service if it was to be made available.

#### Chart 1 - How do you dispose of your household trash?



#### Chart 2 - How much would you be willing to pay to dispose of your trash?

#### Chart 3 - How would you prefer to pay for trash collection services?



## V. Who Should be Responsible for the Collection, Transport and Ultimate Disposal of Trash?

Just as there were differences in how individuals paid for trash collection, there were divided opinions on who bears the ultimate responsibility for dealing with trash. The leading option was clear, however. Just over 40 percent (40.2 to be exact) laid the responsibility at the foot of local government. Just over 27 percent (27.1) felt that private trash haulers should be responsible. Nearly 18 percent (17.8) felt that the individual customer should be responsible, while 14.9 percent were not sure.

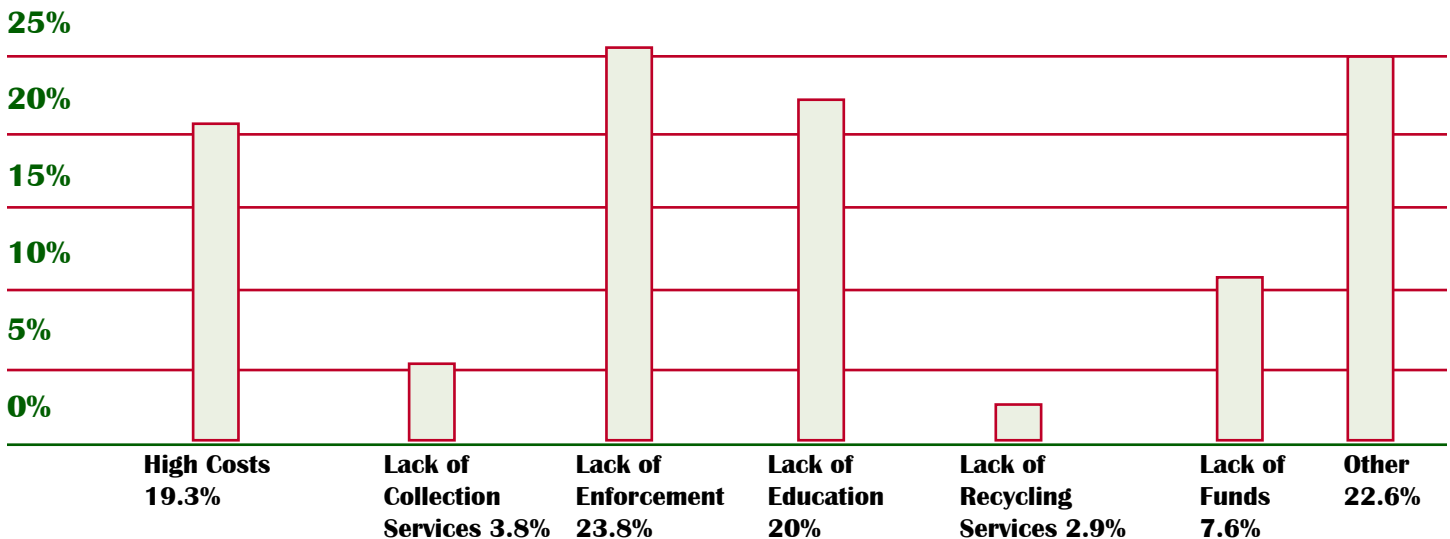
As was the case with several other questions (see the box on page 6), there was a sizable divergence of opinion between rural and urban areas. Urbanites felt strongly (by a 20 percent margin) that the responsibility lay with local government. In rural areas, private contractors were the top choice, with individuals just 3.5 percent behind. Local government, meanwhile, finished in last place behind even those who were unsure.

## VI. Illegal Dumping...Is It a Problem?

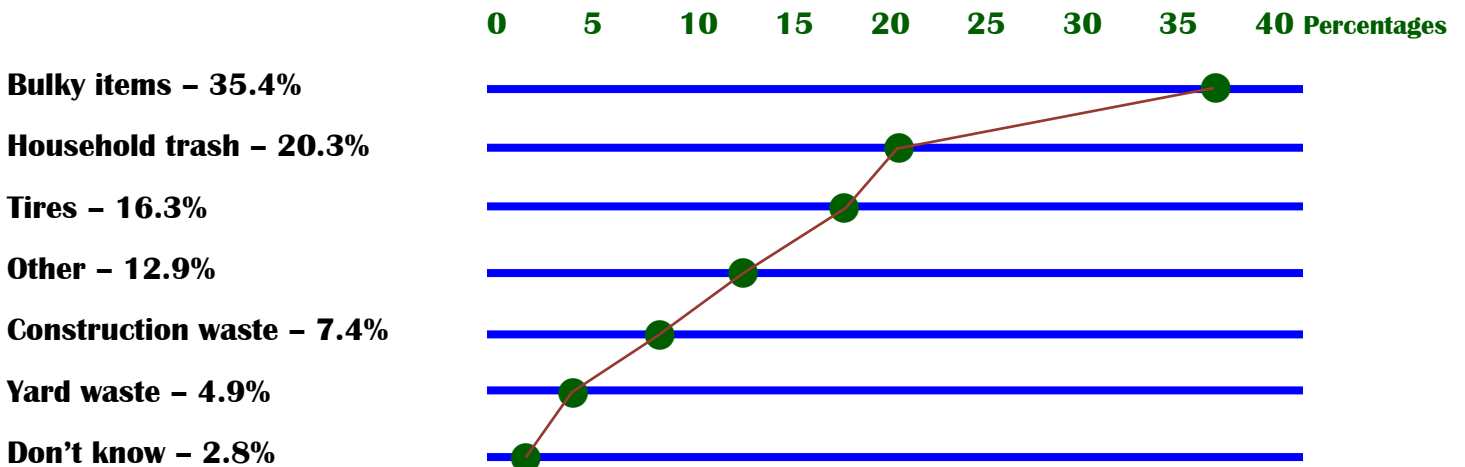
Despite the findings of PA CleanWays (see Chairman's Corner), most Pennsylvanians do not believe their communities have an illegal trash dumping problem. Seventy-seven percent say there is no problem, while 23 percent feel there is. Of that 23 percent, 65.1 percent say they have actually seen the illegal dumping of trash in their communities. Consistent with PA CleanWays' findings regarding the location of illegal dump sites, more rural residents (77.1 percent) than urban residents (61.3 percent) say they have seen illegal trash dumping.

As the first chart below shows, the suspected causes for illegal dumping are many, but the usual "lack of" culprits top the list – lack of enforcement, education and money, but not lack of collection or recycling services.

**Chart 1 - What do you believe is the main cause of illegal trash dumping in your community?**



**Chart 2 - What is the main type of trash dumped illegally in your area?**



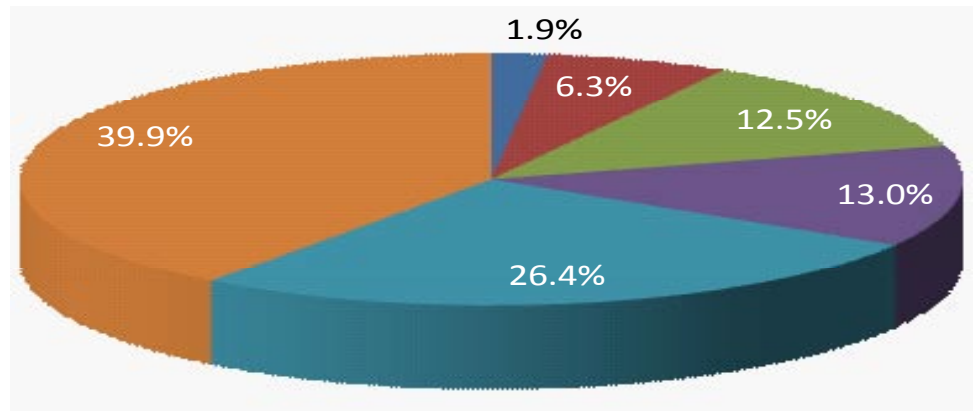
## VII. What's the Problem?

Since 77 percent of individuals responding to the survey felt there was no illegal trash dumping problem in their communities, it might be expected that "none of the above" would be the runaway winner as the biggest community trash problem. Well, it was the second most popular answer, given by 26.4 percent of those responding.

However, one response beat out "none of the above" handily and that was roadside litter, cited by 39.9 percent. Roadside litter, while a significant problem in and of itself, can often be just the most visible sign of other problems, such as illegal dumping (which often takes place in convenient, visible spots along roadways) and of a lack of trash collection services. The fact that roadside litter was cited by so many more individuals than any other problem sadly demonstrates that despite years of anti-litter campaigns, Adopt-a-Highway and statewide clean-ups, Pennsylvanians (and others who are visiting) are still fouling the highways and byways of the commonwealth.

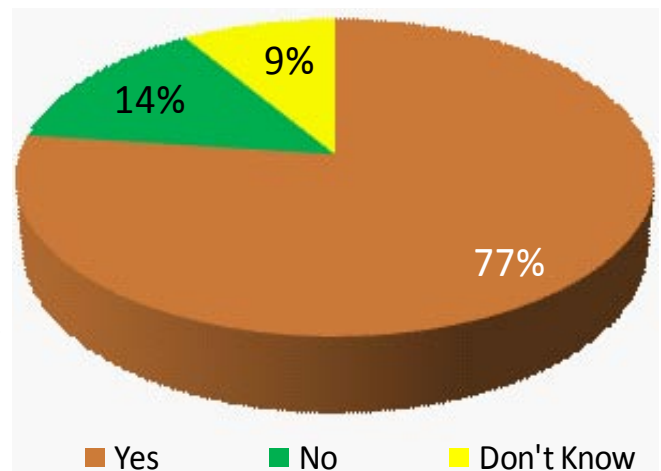
**The "pecking order" of the biggest community trash problems is as follows:**

- **Roadside litter – 39.9%**
- **None of the above – 26.4%;**
- **Trash accumulation on private property – 13.0%**
- **Illegal dumping – 12.5%;**
- **Burning of trash – 6.3%**
- **No trash collection service – 1.9%**



## VIII. Should trash collection be required in all Pennsylvania municipalities?

The response to this question is covered extensively in the Chairman's Corner, but the raw numbers are depicted to the right. It promises to be a topic of further discussion. Proponents feel mandatory collection would help to stop illegal dumping and burning of trash. Opponents worry about unfunded mandates and how such a system would work in sparsely populated, rural areas where curbside collection would be unfeasible. That's one reason the Committee staff visited the Spring Township, Snyder County waste transfer station to see how an alternative collection system might work in rural areas. That visit was described in May 2008's *Environmental Synopsis* (see page 7 of that issue).



### Cross Tabulation - Items of Interest

There were a number of differences in the various cross tabulations of survey responses, with many coming in comparisons of urban and rural areas. Some of the more striking are listed below.

- Urban areas are far higher in mandatory participation in trash collection (71.6% vs. 42.1%) than rural areas and the incidence of no trash collection services in rural areas is nearly 10 percent higher than in urban areas.
- In every breakdown, bulky household items are the items that are dumped illegally the most. Household trash is second in every geographic region, except the Southeast, where tires are second. Tires are also second in urban areas.
- Urban areas remove more bulky household items, collect more yard waste and include recyclables in curbside collection than rural areas by a remarkably consistent margin – 32.6%.
- The Southeast region has the highest percentage of mandatory participation in trash collection.
- Those in the 18-34 year old age group say they burn their trash if they don't have trash collection services. That's 32.9% more than the next closest age group.
- Seniors (65 and over) want to pay their trash bill quarterly or on a per bag basis. All other age groups prefer monthly bills.
- Republicans narrowly favor (by a 3.3% margin) private contractors handling trash collection and disposal over local government, while Democrats strongly favor local government (by a 22.7% margin).

# ON THE HORIZON . . .

A LOOK AT UPCOMING EVENTS

✓ **The Governor's Sustainable Water Infrastructure Task Force (SWITF) has scheduled a series of meetings to discuss formulation of its report, which is to be issued by October 1. All meetings are to be held in Room 105 of the Rachel Carson State Office Building in Harrisburg, PA at 9:30 a.m. unless otherwise noted: Tuesday, July 22; Thursday, August 7; Wednesday, September 3; and Tuesday, September 23 in Room 109, Rachel Carson State Office Building.**

✓ **Thursday, September 18, 10 a.m., Penn Stater Conference Center, 215 Innovation Boulevard, State College, PA – Meeting of the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee's (Committee) Sewage Task Force. Please call the Committee office at (717) 787-7570 if you plan to attend.**

✓ **Thursday, October 2, 10 a.m., Penn Stater Conference Center, 215 Innovation Boulevard, State College, PA – Meeting of the Committee's Forestry Task Force. Please call the Committee office at (717) 787-7570 if you plan to attend.**

**Fall 2008 Environmental Issues Forums will be scheduled when the fall legislative session**

# COMMITTEE CHRONICLES . . .

REVIEW OF SOME MEMORABLE  
COMMITTEE EVENTS



The Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee (Committee) is taking an active role in the recently formed Governor's Sustainable Water Infrastructure Task Force (SWITF), which is working coincidentally with the Committee's own Sewage Task Force, which has been meeting since September 2006. Both bodies are seeking ways to help the state's aging water and wastewater systems afford and implement necessary - but costly - infrastructure improvements.

The SWITF held a series of public listening meetings around the state in May, and two of those meetings were chaired by Committee Chairman Rep. Scott Hutchinson (co-chaired by Committee member Sen. Mary Jo White) and Committee Vice-chairman Sen. Raphael Musto, both of whom are members of SWITF as well.

*In the photo at top left, Rep. Hutchinson is joined by Co-chairman, Committee member and SWITF member Sen. Mary Jo White in presiding over a SWITF listening meeting in Oil City, Venango County.*

*At right, Sen. Musto opens the SWITF listening meeting held in Pittston Township, Luzerne County.*

*The photo at bottom left shows a portion of the large crowd who attended the Pittston meeting to listen and to address the task force regarding water and wastewater needs in Pennsylvania.*



All of the groups involved share a concern about the health, safety and aesthetic problems posed by illegal dumping, and are working to prevent such dumping and improve waste collection processes to make Pennsylvania a cleaner and more beautiful place to live. There was a consensus that it would be helpful to determine what Pennsylvanians thought about their current waste collection systems, what kind of improvements they would like to see, and what they would be willing to support. The questions also sought to find out what Pennsylvanians did with their trash when they had no waste collection system and whether the lack of a system contributed to illegal dumping problems.

The final question, which provided the biggest surprise answer, was this: "Would you support a policy that requires trash collection be provided in all municipalities in Pennsylvania in order to combat illegal dumping." The question was prefaced by the following statement: "Research has shown that it costs Pennsylvania taxpayers \$800 per ton to clean up illegal dumps, while it costs only \$75 to \$90 a ton for household trash collection services." The figures are verified by PA CleanWays based on actual clean-ups it has completed.

A total of 76.8 percent (576 individuals) of those responding to the question supported the idea of mandatory trash collection in Pennsylvania. Fourteen-point-three (14.3) percent, or 107 individuals, opposed such a system, while 9.0 percent (67 individuals) were unsure. The overwhelming support for mandatory trash collection was the first surprise.

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### **The results of the 2008 Mansfield University Statewide Survey can be found on pages 2 - 6**

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The second surprise was that the support was uniform across a number of sub-groups. For example, folks in rural areas supported the idea almost as much as those in urban areas – 73.7 percent and 77.6 percent respectively. Republicans, Democrats and Independents (and even those not registered to vote) all supported it by at least 72.7 percent. While there were different levels of support regionally across Pennsylvania, in no region was there less than 71.8 percent support (Northwest region), and support ranged as high as 81.2 percent in the Northeast. Support was at least 70 percent across all age groups and education levels, and in both males and females and whites and non-whites.

There were some other milder surprises. The survey found that 92.5 percent of Pennsylvanians already had trash collection services, a higher number than might have been expected. And, 64.9 percent of those who did have service said it was already mandatory.

It was interesting to note that only 23 percent of those responding felt their community had an illegal trash dumping problem. The biggest trash problem cited by most people (39.9 percent) was roadside litter. Thirteen percent cited accumulated trash on private property and 12.5 percent illegal dumping.

I would pause here to note that PA CleanWays is in the midst of completing illegal dump surveys in a number of Pennsylvania counties. To date, 15 have been completed and results from nine more are due shortly. Suffice it to say that PA CleanWays has not yet found a county that does not have any illegal dumpsites (the fewest in any county so far are 37) and have found a number of common characteristics (most are in rural locations, visible from the roadway and contain bulky, household items for example). In its reporting of the results, PA CleanWays states, "Overall, very few people are aware of the widespread problem of illegal dumping in Pennsylvania."

The Committee will continue to study the new results found by PA CleanWays, compare notes as to what the surveys show and work with the organization and our other partners on solutions. Check out PA CleanWays' website at [www.pacleanways.org/IDS/ids\\_index.html](http://www.pacleanways.org/IDS/ids_index.html) for the findings.

I invite you to check out the complete results on pages 2 – 6. Page two provides a "Survey Shorthand Summary" of the basic answers, while pages 3 – 6 provide more complete statewide results. Among the results graphically displayed are who should ultimately be responsible for trash collection and disposal, what kinds of service people have now and what is being collected, how much individuals would be willing to pay for service and what kind of payment system they like, and what is being dumped illegally and why.

The Committee was pleased to work once again with Mansfield University and to share the results with our readers and the organizations that helped to develop the survey questions. Hopefully, the results will suggest ways in which to crack down on illegal dumping and improve trash collection.

## **How to Contact The Joint Conservation Committee**

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