

Victoria Reinhardt (Minnesota), Ramsey County Commissioner and Chair of the Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board presentation at the SpeakUp on Garbage Expo, November 13, 2010.

<http://www.speakupwinnipeg.com>

Transcript

>> Richard Cloutier: We have four of the best and the brightest with us this morning.

And they are going to add their thoughts and reactions to what they heard from your brief presentations, and they are also making a presentation of their own.

We begin with, affectionately call her the Queen of garbage, Victoria Reinhardt, with a long history of environmental activity working on policy in the regional state.

She is a regional board member and has served as part of the recycle association of Minnesota from 1989 to 1995, chairperson of the advisory committee, stewardship issues for the state of Minnesota, she currently serves as chairperson for the Ramsay Washington resource recovery board.

And she is currently the chair of the environment and Natural Resources committee and association of Minnesota counties in 2008 she was elected as vice chair of the Minnesota clean water council. Commissioner Reinhardt holds a doctorate of public administration from Hamline University.

Please welcome Victoria.

>> Victoria: And I should start off by saying that yes, one of the commissioners on my board does refer to me as the Queen of Garbage, but I have to tell you, and I carry that title with honour, because one of the reasons that I really, my background and the work that I've done in the environmental field, and how much, why I really like this area is because of the personal responsibility.

You can really make a difference, every single person, there is not that many things in life that every single person can make a difference by simply what they buy, what they recycle and how they handle the waste in their lives.

So if you want to make a huge difference, it is one person at a time.

And that's what you can do with garbage.

But I had to tell you that this, I'm an elected official, I was elected in 1996, and have served a four year term, I'm in the middle of my term right now, and when we were talking about the what we do as a county board, recycling and the environmental part of what we do as a county board is very very strong. About half of our budget in Minnesota,

the counties, about half is human services and the next chunk is safety and then transit and so forth.

I want to tell you a little bit about the solid waste management board and I can tell you also that the comments that I heard this morning already are very much in line with what we are discussing in St. Paul Minneapolis, I prefer it that way rather than Minneapolis St. Paul.

And I should point out, I'm sure that you are familiar but Ramsey County is the City of St. Paul and the other is 17 cities and one township and head of the county is Minneapolis and is a much larger county geographically and obviously more people live there as well, but we have, Ramsey County is considered fully developed and we have unique issues that we have to deal with when you don't have places to basically get rid of your garbage.

So and organics, education, responsibility, especially producer responsibility but also individual responsibility are common themes that I heard this morning.

So, just a quick history of what the solid waste management coordinating board is.

Some people affectionately call it a club, but when some people hear solid waste, they go ewww, and I call it is to increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of the regional waste.

It has six of the counties that part of it, two elected officials from each of the counties, we have over 2.8 million residents and manage 3.000000 tons of stuff annually.

Waste management in the twin cities.

First of all, another thing that I heard today was talking about throwing things away.

And oftentimes in order to get people's attention one of the things I say is there is no such place, no such place as away to.

So you have to start with this about what does it really mean, because once you put it on your curb or however you dispose of your garbage, it is not as if it magically disappears.

And I think that oftentimes people believe that that's exactly what happens.

I can tell you also that and I know that there are some elected officials in the audience here as well, and one of the things that I'm sure they have heard because I know I have, if you really care about, in this case if you really care about the environment you will find the money to do this.

And my response to that is if you tell me where that money is I will go to the end of the earth to get it. Because the reality is as elected officials, and stewards of the property

taxes, and again in Minnesota counties have property taxes and the state has sales taxes or other pots that they can go to.

But the county has property taxes.

And we have to, whether you are a legislator or a county commissioner or a city councillor, there are I really believe decision makers that make decisions based on what is the right thing to do for the environment.

And then there are officials that make decisions based on how much does it cost and that's the only thing that matters.

For most of us it is in the middle.

We have to do what we think is right but we also have to keep that cost effectiveness in mind because people aren't willing to go further and spend more taxes than they need to, which makes sense.

So, in the twin cities we are legislatively mandated, the counties are, to develop waste management plans that are consistent with the hierarchy.

We collaborate with the boards to develop policies and implement the projects of mutual benefit to its members, we don't always agree, and we couldn't don't there has been violent agreements, actually that was true, there is some violent agreements once in a while too.

And disagreements as well.

Where we are each trying to protect our own property taxpayers or the environment in a way that's different than the county next to us.

And this is something that's very different here than it is in the twin cities, is the significant private sector role in the delivery of services and ownership of the facilities.

We have 234 licensed haulers in MSW and nearly all of them are private haulers who determine the disposal destination.

So we work very carefully with the private sector.

And the design of the programs is done at the municipal level.

So, I live in the City of White Bear Lake, and we have had organized collection so the city puts out a RFP, they say in that RFP where they want the waste to go, and what recycling has to be picked up and so forth.

We have had that for a long time.

We pay less than our neighbouring cities where they don't have organized garbage collection and you can literally have five different haulers coming down at different times and you have individualized service and the cost is more for obvious reasons.

The waste management hierarchy.

Put simply and again I hear a lot of this as you are talking this morning at the top of the hierarchy is waste reduction and reduce, then recycling, composting of, separating compost material.

Resource recovering through composting or incineration.

And landfill at the bottom and you move that waste up the hierarchy to the extent that you can.

And there is a statute that is in place that has no teeth that says that there would be no unprocessed waste in land fills in the twin cities metropolitan area by 1990, we did not make that.

We have volume based fees so if you have a 30 gal rate or 60 or 90 gallons you just can't put out anything you want, it is unlimited because you are going to pay extra if you do that.

We also have a number of bans and that is something that was interesting as I was listening this morning.

And we have kind of gone away from bans, the state legislated bans on materials and looking more at an extended user responsibility framework, in order to not deal with each individual product because it gets really frustrating, but we do have, we have for a long time bans on tires, appliances, electronic waste, fluorescent lamps, there are a number of things that can not go into the garage, but you have to have infrastructure in place to deal with those separately.

We are get funding through the state of Minnesota and I am only one of the people that knows what this stands for -- it brings in 40 to \$60 million a year and it is taxed on your garbage carts.

The counties unfortunately are only getting, I think at this point, it is 14 million that counts for all 87 counties in the state, the rest has been co oped so it goes into the general fund.

Most of this system is funded by the property taxes.

So this is how we have done it.

You can see the 2009 tonnage, the percentage, we are recycling, 52 per cent of our waste delivered for processing 32 per cent in landfill, 23 per cent for over 3 million tons.

The accomplishments, again we are really trying to advance environmental policy.

There are waste compostable bags, it is very new, and the process that you are going through right now, we have regional master plans that must be in compliance with the state policy plan.

The education, and the outreach that we have done through Rethink rRecycling and really kind of focusing on different products each year has early been very very successful, one of the things that we are looking at and will concentrate on next year is organics.

Some accomplishments, the household hazardous waste.

Shingles recycling and I believe that the shingles that are shown there are from my house because we had a huge storm and voila, they could come and use my house as an example.

And we worked really hard and long with the department of transportation to allow the tear off shingles to be used in asphalt.

Licensing is - something that haulers love is - issuing a MSW haulers licence and annual renewal through the regional program.

They don't have to go to six counties and get insurance certificates from six counties it comes through the coordinating board.

And finally the challenges.

We are always trying to, as I said, move things up the hierarchy.

There are regulatory financial and operational issues that we all have to deal with and we have those.

Economies, just this year, they are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The private sector has a huge influence on how waste is disposed of, where it is disposed of, we need to figure out how we bring that in line with what the state law says.

Lack of facility capacity and regulatory requirements, and changing consumer behaviour is difficult sometimes, because we are all, as human beings, resistant to change.

We need additional legislative leadership to make the significant strides and I'm sure that's what your city council is in the process of doing as well.

Thank you.