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Incinerator boom goes bust



SPOKANE
(AP) — The rush to build hazardous waste incinerators has ended in Eastern Washington, which three years ago faced the prospect of becoming home to three new waste burners.

The projects, hindered by a national surplus of incinerators and changing government policies, have either been canceled or indefinitely deferred.

The proposals grew out of fears in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the nation would soon be unable to safely dispose of all its hazardous waste.

The Bush administration began encouraging every region of the country to have sufficient incineration capacity, and a 1989 law required states to find ways to dispose of their hazardous waste or face a cutoff of federal Superfund money to clean up polluted sites.

The fears that inspired such policies have proven unfounded, government officials now say.

"The methodology on the projection of need was flawed," said Gerald Lenssen, the head of hazardous waste permits for the state Department of Ecology.

Three private firms in the early 1990s planned to build large Eastern Washington incinerators:

- The ECOS Corp., a subsidiary of Burlington Resources Inc., planned to operate an incinerator and landfill near the Adams County town of Lind.

- Rabanco Ltd. of Seattle, in partnership with the Swiss company Van Roll Inc., proposed a facility outside Vantage in Grant County to burn 50,000 tons of hazardous wastes a year.

- Chemical Waste Management, a subsidiary of WMX Technologies Inc., wanted to build an incinerator on state-leased land at the Hanford nuclear reservation.

The burners were to dispose of hazardous materials ranging from solvents to contaminated soil from environmental cleanup sites.

ECOS withdrew its proposal in November 1992, and the state halted all work to grant a permit for the Rabanco project in September 1993. In addition, Rabanco's lease for the adjacent landfill has expired.

Chemical Waste Management never applied for a state permit, and WMX this month announced it was writing off

\$91 million of Chemical Waste's losses. The parent firm cited a national glut of hazardous waste disposal facilities and lower-than-expected waste volumes.

In February 1993, 15 Western states that had agreed to cooperate to assure adequate facilities said they expected to have excess incineration capacity within two years.

The projection followed the opening of two large incinerators in Utah and the addition of Nebraska and Kansas to the Western regional compact. Incinerators had already been built in both states.

In response, federal and state officials shifted emphasis from increasing disposal capacity to reducing waste.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1993 imposed an 18-month moratorium on new hazardous waste incinerators so it could study the safety of the technology. The state followed suit with its own moratorium later that year.

"We are no longer emphasizing incineration," Lenssen said. "We are shifting resources to pollution prevention."

Homeless protest Final Four

SEATTLE (AP) — Members of an advocacy group who view the Final Four college basketball championships as a threat to the city's homeless organized a march and demonstration Wednesday that ended with 18 arrests.

A tent shelter hastily built near the Kingdome was torn down.

The idea was to build a temporary shelter where the homeless could stay throughout the upcoming Final Four weekend, said Scott Morrow, a staff member of the Seattle Housing and Resources Effort (SHARE).

"Our goal is to provide a safe place in the neighborhood for citizens who are at risk but have no place else to go," Morrow said.

About 90 people gathered in Pioneer Square's Occidental Park and marched to a vacant lot about 400 yards south of the stadium where the tournament will take place this weekend.

About 30 people scurried to erect four tattered military tents and built a makeshift soupline before police moved in.

The Final Four will cause the downtown district of Pioneer Square — the home of the Kingdome and a popular area for many of the city's homeless — to swell with rowdy fans and overzealous police, say some members of the homeless community.

"The Final Four is definitely a threat to our community," said Jerry Koslosky, 49, the manager of a Seattle homeless shelter who says he has spent several years on the streets.

"We have tried to work with the members of SHARE to find ways to mitigate their concerns," said Rebecca Hale, a spokeswoman for Mayor Norm Rice. "But we can not allow tent cities to exist in the city. The mayor has been very clear about that."

Those arrested for trespassing included the homeless and their advocates. The vacant lot belongs to the state of Washington and is controlled by the state Department of Transportation.

City employees took down the tents about two hours after they were erected.

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