

## Miscellany 20: Mega Waste Landfills in South Carolina

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### Miscellany: Commentary on Recent Events and Reading

Here are copies of three letters that I wrote recently on the subject  
of mega waste landfills in South Carolina, where I now live.

### No more for-profit landfills, no more acceptance of non-local waste

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22 February 2006

Subject: No more for-profit landfills, no more acceptance of non-  
local waste

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing in support of efforts to prevent the establishment of another large waste landfill in upstate South Carolina. The Upstate is already a dumping ground for waste from other places – it has been estimated that the large Palmetto landfill near my home (US 29 and I-85) receives 75-85% of waste from outside the State. There is absolutely no need for another large landfill in our area at this time – all we have to do is stop accepting “other people’s garbage” and use our precious land for our own waste. For-profit companies and complicit politicians want to build more and more mega-landfills, filling South Carolina with out-of-state waste, simply for economic gain, with no concern for the environment or for future generations. Some of the waste in these landfills will last for at least 10,000 years!

The recent proposal to establish a \$100 million landfill at Enoree will add \$100 million dollars to the Spartanburg-area economy (even if located “South of the Border” in Union County or other nearby county). As I have written in my book on population and the environment (*Can America Survive?* at <http://www.foundationwebsite.org/canam4x.htm> ), the country -- indeed, the world – cannot simply keep expanding its economy, without eventually drowning in its own waste. Each dollar of economic activity generates more waste that is not recycled by the environment. (Other relevant references include *Beyond Growth* by Herman E. Daly, *For the Common Good* by Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., and *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen.) In order to survive on this planet, we must *minimize*, not *maximize*, economic activity. The proposed landfill will add \$100 million in economic activity to the area, and diminish the quality of our lives by an equivalent amount of waste and environmental destruction. For Spartanburg to survive in the long term, it must bring a halt to economic growth and the inevitable environmental destruction that accompanies it.

Recently, our legislators, responding to the growing public rage over profit-motivated landfills, have been “backpedaling,” suggesting that South Carolina landfills accept no more than 50 percent of “foreign” garbage. Why 50 percent? Why not zero? For the next several years, I propose that we arrange to send all of Spartanburg County’s trash back to the places that have been dumping their garbage here for the past several years. Why soil our nest with other people’s waste? Turnabout is fair play!

Sincerely,

Joseph George Caldwell  
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## **The Shame of South Carolina’s Landfill Prostitution**

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26 February 2006

Subject: The Shame of South Carolina’s Landfill Prostitution

Dear Sir/Madam:

The residents of Spartanburg County are engaged in a furious struggle to stop their elected representatives from “selling out” to commercial enterprises that wish to use South Carolina land for mega-landfills that accept massive amounts of refuse from other states. At the Palmetto Landfill two miles from my home, it is estimated that 85 percent of the garbage dumped there is from out-of-state. Some South Carolina waste landfills accept garbage from as far away as New England. In many cases, they are not

“fills” at all, but huge mountains of waste, growing like cancers on our beautiful landscape.

If you look at a map displaying the locations of municipal solid waste landfills in South Carolina, you will see a concentration of them near the North Carolina and Georgia borders. Those states do not wish to foul their nests with their own waste, and are delighted that South Carolina is willing to accommodate.

In addition to being a dumping ground for municipal waste, South Carolina is a national dump for radioactive waste. There is now a move on foot to send large amounts of highly-toxic plutonium to South Carolina, from all over the nation.

At the end of World War II, Japan had been destroyed. Its cities were in ruins and its economy was destroyed. Although the Japanese are a fiercely proud culture, right after the war there was a surge in prostitution in Japan. Japanese women who would never have engaged in prostitution were driven to it, in order for their families to survive. As quickly as the Japanese economy was rebuilt, however, the level of prostitution dropped to low prewar levels. The Japanese did what had to be done to support their families, but they stopped their shameful and humiliating actions as soon as they were able.

Fifty years ago, South Carolina was a poor state, by most measures of economic progress. To its shame, it got into the business of selling its natural environment for use as waste landfills. It is now addicted to this practice. The pressure to build more mega-landfills is strong, despite the fact that no more landfills are needed to handle waste generated in South Carolina for many, many years to come. Local politicians urge their constituents to continue the practice of accepting massive amounts of out-of-state waste. They point out that the locality will receive millions of dollars in exchange for accepting the waste –

revenues for the county, not for the State. They point out that there is not sufficient local waste to make mega-landfills profitable, and that this money can be used to offset taxes. They never factor in a cost for the natural land that is forever destroyed by the landfill.

In the 1950s and 1960s, South Carolina, which had little industry at the time, started an ambitious program of technical education. This program was very successful. (I know firsthand of this program, since my father, a tool-and-die-maker from Canada, was an industrial arts teacher in it for much of his life.) The State developed a sizable skilled workforce, and now attracts industrial investment from around the world. South Carolina now has a respectable modern economy. It does not have to continue to prostitute itself by selling its natural land to be used by other states for their waste. As soon as the proud culture of Japan got back on its feet after World War II, prostitution declined dramatically. But the sale of our natural land to be used by other states for their waste has not diminished as our economy developed – in fact, it is increasing! Our local politicians tell us that if we do not accept these mega-landfills, we will forego the massive amounts of money that other states are willing to transfer to us to accept their waste, and our taxes will rise.

As soon as the Petroleum Age ends, within the next few decades, global industrialization will come to an end, and the world will return to an agrarian way of life based on solar energy. Before long, the small layer of dirt that covers our mega-landfills will be eroded away. The millions of tons of waste that we are accepting from other states will then be exposed. Because it is economically efficient, today's America makes no effort to reprocess its municipal waste back to a natural state – it simply buries it whole. Once this unprocessed waste is exposed, it will start to blow away, float down the rivers and streams, pollute the groundwater, fill our lakes, despoil our wildlife, and ruin the

landscape. It is estimated that some municipal waste lasts as long as 10,000 years. This is quite a legacy that we are bequeathing to our descendants.

Is nothing sacred? Are we willing to sacrifice anything for money? The merchants of waste profit by millions of dollars selling South Carolina's natural land to other states for use as their garbage dumps. Business interests and their local-politician allies press hard to sell more and more of our land for other states' waste. But South Carolina pays a heavy price in this exchange. We sacrifice our natural environment to create mountains of waste that become festering boils that last for eons, simply to make a few dollars for today's moneyed interests. The dollars earned by these procurers, who would debase our natural land for money, will soon disappear, as the industrial age draws to a close. But the mountains of waste that they have left in our fair land will last for ages. These mountains of waste are their legacy – and ours – to all future generations of South Carolinians.

Has South Carolina no sense of shame? Has it no pride? We are no longer the “poor relation” of other states. We no longer have to sacrifice our natural land to store their waste. We can pay for our government with our own tax revenues, even if taxes have to be higher if we do not accept waste from other states. We do not need to prostitute our natural environment as waste landfills to other states, to fund our government. We can pay our own way. Venal county politicians in some counties are selling South Carolina's natural land to be used as dumping grounds by other states. Do South Carolina's citizens not care that their birthright – and the birthright of their unborn progeny for countless generations – is being sold by today's local politicians for a few pieces of silver?

It does not matter how much money our neighbors are willing to pay us to accept their waste. We are now industrially developed,

and can afford to fund our government by means of our own tax dollars.

It is high time for the ignominious era of South Carolina's landfill prostitution to come to an end.

Sincerely,

Joseph George Caldwell

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## **The Outrageous Landfill Proposition**

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4 March 2006

Subject: The Outrageous Landfill Proposition

Dear Sir/Madam:

Yesterday my wife and I attended a Spartanburg County Council meeting in which lawyers working for the Council presented a deal that they had negotiated with Waste Management, Incorporated, to build a large municipal waste landfill in Spartanburg County at Enoree.

The negotiated deal was outrageous! So were the presentation by the lawyers and the reception by the Council's negotiating committee. The presentation represented that Spartanburg County would receive monetary benefits equal to \$251 million over 37.5 years (undiscounted) if it allows Waste Management to build and operate the landfill. (To his credit, one of the committee

members (Mr. Danny Allen) pointed out that the (discounted) present value of the deal is far less, since the time over which the money is received extends so far into the future.) The negotiating lawyers stressed that they had taken all important aspects into account, including consideration of nonmonetary benefits, such as ball fields and hiking trails near the landfill. On the surface, the deal looks really good for the County. The County would receive \$102 million in direct payments, the Enoree community would receive \$23 million, and the County would be permitted to dump 111,000 tons of waste per year at the facility, valued at an estimated \$125 million (assuming a value of \$30/ton).

The presentation made by the lawyers, and the discussion of it by the members of the negotiating was deceptive and misleading. The discussion was not transparent. It did not include a comprehensive discussion of costs and benefits of a range of alternatives, and it did not identify the winners and losers – who benefits and who pays – in the proposed deal. What was completely glossed over by the lawyers and the County negotiating committee members is the fact that it is possible for Waste Management to pay the County this large amount of money only by accepting massive amounts of waste from outside the County. The proposal is for Waste Management to be allowed to accept 1.15 million tons per year of waste into the landfill (about ten times the amount generated by local residents), from any source whatsoever. In fact, most of the waste would not even be from other South Carolina counties. Based on experience at Waste Management's existing Palmetto landfill in Spartanburg County (which the Enoree landfill would replace / continue), it would be from *outside the state*. In the one-and-one-half hour presentation, this fact – that most of the waste would be from out-of-state – was never mentioned or discussed, either by the lawyers or the negotiating committee members.

What is worse, the “better deal” that the lawyers represented that they had obtained from Waste Management for the County was not a better deal at all – it was a far worse deal. It increased the monetary value of the deal by massively increasing the height of the landfill (as I recall, by 50 percent, from 100 to 150 feet – this fact was not included in the computer graphics or printed handouts of the presentation), and the duration of dumping operations from 20 years to 37.5 years. Their “better deal” simply gave away more of South Carolina’s natural land and sky to Waste Management, increased the size of the waste mountain by a massive amount (from that of a ten-story building to fifteen stories), and almost doubled the term of operation, during which the quality of life of Enoree residents is greatly diminished. Their “better deal” mainly involved raping South Carolina land and Enoree residents for twice as long, and paying twice as much. Their “better deal” results in a permanent mountain of waste that is massively larger than that previously proposed. The “better deal” makes the final landfill an even greater environmental hazard, when it eventually breaks open and spews its rotting contents across our fields, streams, rivers and lakes. The lawyers simply proposed giving Waste Management permission to build a much larger landfill and operate it for a much longer time. Some deal! For Waste Management. And for citizens who are unwilling to pay for the cost of disposing of their own waste, no matter what the cost to others may be.

This is an outrage! There is no free lunch. The fact that the County is avoiding paying for disposal of its waste by becoming a dumping ground for “other people’s waste” should have been mentioned and discussed. In the proposed deal, the County would accept ten times as much waste from other places as its own citizens generate (1.15 million tons vs. 111 thousand tons) – and, based on experience, this would be from other states. Of all the options and benefits presented by the lawyers, no option ever involved limiting the amount of out-of-state waste to be accepted

by the County, or even the amount of out-of-county waste from other South Carolina counties. It did not explore options such as *decreasing* the height of the landfill, or *decreasing* the length of time that the landfill could be operated (e.g., by decreasing the time of operation (and concurrent suspension of Enoree quality of life) from twenty years to five. It did not explore the option of having Waste Management simply operate the County's existing Wellford landfill, with no construction of a new landfill at Enoree. It did not explore the option of transporting South Carolina waste to other states, in return for their having dumped waste in our state for many years. The "better deal" involved only giving Waste Management the authority to build a massively *greater* eyesore on South Carolina land than previously proposed, and to greatly diminish the quality of life for Enoree residents for two generations rather than one (while the landfill is in active operation).

The lawyers simply proposed giving Waste Management permission to create twice as large a festering boil on South Carolina land, for twice the money. No options were presented in which the size or duration of the operation would be decreased. The only option presented was one in which Waste Management stands to make twice the income, by allowing it to dump about twice as much garbage – mostly from other states – at Enoree, over almost twice as long a period. This outrageous deal begs the question: whom were the negotiating lawyers representing? Their "better deal" simply doubled the expected income and profits to Waste Management, at a cost of vastly increasing the size of the waste mountain and the length of time to build it. The deal doubled the benefits to Waste Management and Spartanburg County taxpayers, and doubled the burden of the resulting waste mountain on Enoree residents, both current (who will live with the noise and smell of the active landfill) and future (who will live with a larger mountain of waste, or its spewed contents, for all time). The lawyers may have represented the monetary interests of

Spartanburg County taxpayers, and they certainly improved the deal from the perspective of Waste Management, but they certainly did not represent the interests of the unborn future residents of Enoree, who will have to live with a massive mountain of waste forever. Their negotiated deal did not explore options that would have reduced the environmental impact of the County's landfill operations – it explored only options for vastly increasing them, far beyond what is necessary for handling of County-generated waste.

To enhance the quality of life for South Carolina, both for its current and future residents, it is necessary to explore options under which the total size of our landfills is as *small* as possible, not as *large* as possible. It is desirable to consider options under which limits are placed on the amount of out-of-state waste, or to consider reciprocal agreements under which waste is accepted from other states only to the extent that they receive waste from South Carolina. The County's negotiating lawyers moved to a deal that increases the size and term of operation of the landfill by a massive amount, and profits Waste Management by a commensurate amount. Their motivation, it seems evident, was to *maximize*, not *minimize*, the amount of waste deposited in South Carolina from other states.

In the presentation, no mention was ever made of placing a limit on the amount of out-of-state waste to be allowed. No mention was ever made of the fact that the County was destroying natural South Carolina land for all future time, and that this would benefit only Waste Management and the present generation of Spartanburg County taxpayers. No mention was made of the fact that our landfills do not have to be ten times larger than necessary. The only reasons for doing this are to generate massive profits for Waste Management, and for residents of Spartanburg County to avoid paying the cost of processing their own waste.

If people want to live in Spartanburg County, they will generate waste, and they should expect to pay for the cost of recycling or disposing of it by themselves. They should not expect to be able to avoid the cost of disposing of their own waste by transferring this cost to others, in this case by destroying natural South Carolina for use in hosting waste from other states. It would be one thing if the 1.15 million tons of waste from other places were all from Spartanburg County, or even if it were all from other counties in South Carolina, but it will not be – as we know from bitter experience, most of it will be from other states, such as North Carolina and Georgia. This is South Carolina land that the County is destroying, for its own purposes (avoidance of paying for its waste disposal) and the profit of Waste Management. Ownership and stewardship responsibility for this land rests with all citizens of South Carolina, not just to the current residents of Spartanburg County. The benefits of this deal will benefit Waste Management and the current taxpayers of Spartanburg County, but the cost of the land forever lost to the landfill will be borne by all South Carolina citizens, both those alive today and those unborn for countless generations. From the viewpoint of equity, the financial and environmental cost of our waste should be borne by us, and the environmental cost of other states' waste should be borne by them, not by us.

In a recent ad (*Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, Thursday, March 2), Waste Management threatened that, if the new landfill is not build, "...additional capacity at the site [the Wellford landfill] would have to be permitted and constructed *at local taxpayer expense*, conservatively estimated at more than \$80 million over the next 20 years." As long as that landfill accepts only locally generated waste, that is fine – if County residents generate waste, then they should expect to pay for the cost of disposing of it. Someone has to pay. Until now, the County negotiators have been striving to shift the burden from the people generating the waste to someone

else. People who are not freeloaders should expect to pay their own way, and not seek to avoid paying taxes by selling off the County for use as a dump by other states, at the cost of destroying South Carolina land and the quality of life for its current and future residents.

If it considers the negotiated proposal, Spartanburg County would be proposing to permanently destroy South Carolina land for use as a dumping ground for other states' waste. The \$251 million will not benefit citizens of South Carolina other than those in Spartanburg County during the period of operation of the landfill – the fees obtained and the costs avoided accrue only to current Spartanburg County residents, and only while the landfill is in operation – not to the State, and not to future generations. The \$251 million will benefit only the current residents of the County; the cost of this deal will diminish the quality of life for millions of people of future generations, who will have to live with the mountain of waste forever, or with eons of trash in its fields, rivers, and lakes, after it eventually ruptures.

Spartanburg County citizens are generating waste, and they should accept responsibility for the cost of disposing of it in their own area. In times past, the citizens of each locality covered the cost of waste disposal by sacrificing their own land, and by imposing taxes to cover the cost of the waste disposal operations. It is outrageous that Spartanburg County Council is proposing to transfer all of the cost of its waste disposal to others (Enoree residents, including generations of those not yet born), by converting natural South Carolina land to massive dumps for out-of-state waste. The citizens of the other states that are sending their waste to South Carolina have accepted financial responsibility for their waste disposal. They evidently have more pride in their environment than do the citizens of South Carolina, on whom they are dumping their waste.

There is no good reason for South Carolina land to be destroyed for use as garbage dumps for other states' refuse. There is no good reason for Enoree to become a massive garbage dumping operation for the next 37.5 years. There is no good reason for the principal landmark in Enoree to become a gargantuan mountain of waste. The only reasons for another mega-landfill for other states' waste are to line the pockets of Waste Management, to enable other states to avoid the problem of taking care of their own waste, and to enable current Spartanburg County residents to shift the cost of their waste disposal to Enoree's current residents and the future generations who will have to live with a permanent mountain of waste. There is no need for another landfill in Spartanburg County for the next 37.5 years, if the State would simply ban the importing of waste from other states. Why not force other states to start taking responsibility for their own waste? How has it happened that South Carolina has ended up destroying its land for other states' garbage, and not the other way around – or at least on a reciprocal basis? Does no one in South Carolina in a position of power care about the State's land, or the quality of life of South Carolina residents for all future time? Who is protecting the environment from those who would plunder and destroy it? Who speaks for the unborn generations who must live forever with the mountain of waste that Spartanburg County and Waste Management wish to construct?

The negotiating lawyers may have brokered a good deal for Waste Management and for current Spartanburg County taxpayers, but they did this at the cost of selling a precious asset – our natural land and sky – that belongs to all South Carolina citizens, including those millions not yet born. In their negotiations with Waste Management, why did the lawyers not consider any options in which Spartanburg County sends its waste to other states and other counties, as they have been sending to us for years? Why did they not consider an option of having Waste Management operate a landfill exclusively for use

by Spartanburg County, or by South Carolina, and we pay a fair price for this operation? The only option examined was one in which the County would avoid all costs of disposing of its own waste, and let Enoree residents, both present and future, pay the cost. This is immoral, by any standard or morality.

The proposed deal includes provisions for payments to be made to current residents of Enoree (\$24 million over the 37.5 year operating period). The future generations of Enoree residents will not receive a dime, however, for having to live with a mountain of waste forever. Are Enoree's current residents willing to sell their descendant's birthright to unspoiled land for a few dollars? The payments will continue for only 37.5 years. The mountain of waste, or the flow of garbage from it when it ruptures, will last forever. The proposed deal is based solely on greed. Money is being offered to Spartanburg County residents, and to the Enoree community, to allow the construction of an obscenely large mountain of out-of-state waste. When the current residents of Spartanburg County and Enoree have passed away, the money will be gone. The mountain of waste that they left behind as a legacy for their descendants will be a lasting reminder of what they did, and what type of people they were. The issue facing Enoree in the "better deal" is whether they will sell the beauty of their land, which might have been enjoyed for millions of their descendants for millions of years, for a money payment of about \$500 thousand per year over the next 37.5 years. Will the current generation of Enoree agree to this? I hope not. If they do, then the other residents of Spartanburg County will hardly be under any moral obligation to resist making a deal with Waste Management to build the mountain of trash at Enoree – if Enoree residents are willing to sell their children's birthright for a few pieces of silver, why should anyone else care?

After the lawyers' presentation, two members of the negotiating committee spoke out. One (Ms. Julie Lowry) professed that she

had a concern for the environment, but that we have to have a landfill for our waste. That is true, but we do not need to accept ten times as much waste from other states as we generate ourselves! If we do not allow other states to dump their waste on South Carolina land, our landfills can be one-tenth as large, or there can be one-tenth as many (using the ten-to-one factor assumed in the negotiation presentation). Another member (Mr. Steve Parker) expressed that he did not want a landfill at all, but we had to have one. Once again, as was the case with Ms. Lowry, he did not mention that we do not have to have ten times the landfill capacity than what is required only for the waste generated by County citizens.

The Palmetto landfill in Spartanburg County could have addressed the County's landfill needs for many decades, had Waste Management not accepted waste from other states. If it had not done so, there would be no need at all for another mega-landfill at Enoree. As soon as that landfill opens, Waste Management will no doubt continue its practice of accepting waste from other states. In fact, since the proposed "tipping fee" for the Enoree landfill is low compared to that in other states, there is a strong incentive for other states to send their trash to South Carolina. (It is my understanding that in the past some waste companies have in fact solicited waste from other states, encouraging them to send it to Spartanburg County because it is so cheap.) It is clear that Waste Management will race to fill the Enoree landfill with out-of-state waste, just as it has done with Palmetto, and the search for a site for another mega-landfill will begin again.

The environmental cost of an industrial society's waste is extreme, lasting for thousands of years. It is not moral to pass this cost on to the future generations who did not generate it. If modern industrial society had a moral conscience, it would recycle all of the waste that it generates back into a natural state,

rather than passing the raw garbage on to our descendent by heaping it into large mountains. That “total-reprocessing” option is very expensive, however, and in our industrial, profit-motivated, environment-destroying world, it is not addressed by any municipality; it is unrealistic to expect Spartanburg to do so. Like a small child, our industrial society has chosen the easy way, of simply burying it. This is an unsustainable approach, that eventually must come to an end. Why not end it now, before countless additional mountains of waste are built? Are mountains of waste, rivaling the pyramids in size, the legacy that we choose to leave to our descendents? If so, they will curse our name.

The negotiated deal represents nothing more than a bribe by Waste Management to entice current Spartanburg County and Enoree community residents to exchange the natural beauty of Enoree land for a permanent mountain of waste. This deal is truly a deal with the devil. The current residents obtain some money, and all future generations live with a mountain of waste and its spewing contents for all time. The negotiated deal is a shameless attempt to make a short-term profit for Waste Management and the current residents of Spartanburg County, with the cost – a scarred and polluted environment – borne by unborn millions who are unable to voice their opposition. If this deal is to be resisted, it will have to be on moral grounds – the monetary incentives to destroy the land are incredibly great. From the viewpoint of Christian morality, there is a strong basis for resisting. The Bible says, “Do not pollute the land where you are.” It warns that those who destroy the earth shall be destroyed. Let us hope that the residents of Spartanburg County and Enoree community accept the burden of stewardship of the land, so that it may be enjoyed forever by their children. There is no need for the land to be destroyed. South Carolina does not need this landfill. Let us hope that the Enoree landfill is never built.

I leave on Tuesday for a several-month consulting assignment in East Timor, so this will be my last opportunity to observe and comment on the Enoree landfill controversy. (As I prepare for my departure, I am severely short on time, so please pardon if this note is a little repetitive and rambling in places.) I have enjoyed meeting with the fine people of Enoree, and I pray for the success of their valiant efforts to preserve their natural environment in the face of a formidable foe. In struggles involving land and money, money almost always wins. I hope that this is not the case in the present instance. All that they have on their side is a moral cause. I pray that they will prevail in their struggle, and that their descendents will inherit their beautiful land, rather than a mountain of waste. Let us hope that Enoree's heritage remains a beautiful rural environment along a sleepy river in South Carolina, rather than an obscene monument to the folly of industrialization that Waste Management and others who would share in the proposed bribe, would build in its place. I hope that upon my return the issue has been resolved, and the practice of selling South Carolina's natural environment for use as a dumping ground by other states has come to an end.

Sincerely,

Joseph George Caldwell

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