



Posted on Wed, Mar. 18, 2009

## Move to ban dumps gains momentum

### Senate subcommittee votes to temporarily halt mega-facilities for two years

By SAMMY FRETWELL  
[sfretwell@thestate.com](mailto:sfretwell@thestate.com)

Efforts to prevent other states from dumping garbage in South Carolina gathered steam Tuesday when key senators decided to ban mega-landfills — temporarily.

A Senate Medical Affairs subcommittee voted to stop giant landfills proposed in Marlboro and Cherokee counties for up to two years while the state works to strengthen landfill regulation.

The ban also would apply to a mega-landfill proposed for Williamsburg County, although county leaders apparently have shelved those plans.

Tuesday's vote was a compromise that addresses the most immediate concerns in South Carolina — the import of out-of-state waste to huge dumping grounds, committee members said.

But it allows expansion of some smaller landfills — including one on Screaming Eagle Road near Columbia — that are in the final approval stages. It also does not affect construction and demolition landfills industries say they need to dump old boards, concrete and other building materials.

The full Medical Affairs committee is expected to decide Thursday whether to send the legislation to the Senate. Sen. Danny Verdin, R-Laurens, said the bill has a chance to pass the Legislature this year.

"The message comes through loud and clear that our being a main depository for out-of-state waste has come to an end," Verdin said after hearing about two hours of testimony over the proposed ban. "We'll prove it when we pass this moratorium" Thursday.

The meeting Tuesday, which drew about 150 people, was so large that only about one-third of the crowd fit into the small meeting room in the Senate office building. During the hearing, conservation groups and local citizens organizations pushed the committee to ban mega-landfills until South Carolina can tighten its landfill rules.

Waste companies and county governments sought exemptions to the ban, arguing the disposal sites are needed to bury refuse safely. MRR Southern, which has proposed the Marlboro County landfill, and Waste Management, which wants to open the Cherokee landfill to replace one in Spartanburg County, spoke against a moratorium.

"We are straight in the cross hairs of the moratorium," said Sally Rogers, a lobbyist with the McNair law firm, who was representing Waste Management.

South Carolina is one of 11 states to import more than 1 million tons of garbage each year. Much of the refuse goes to a large landfill in Lee County. Garbage is shipped in on rail cars from New York, New Jersey, North Carolina and other East Coast states. Landfills proposed for Marlboro, Williamsburg and Cherokee counties would be comparable in size to the Lee County landfill.

State regulations the Department of Health and Environmental Control oversees have allowed national and regional waste companies to obtain far more capacity for landfills than state residents need, which means there is plenty of room for out-of-state waste at some disposal sites. Waste companies have approached poor counties with lucrative offers for the right to dispose of waste.

The subcommittee's plan says the moratorium would apply to mega-landfills until the state tightens landfill regulations, which could occur as soon as next year. If that doesn't happen, the ban would stay in place until 2011, the committee agreed.

A proposal now under consideration at DHEC would reduce the disposal capacity for landfills from 42 million tons per year to fewer than 13 million tons, DHEC's Kent Coleman said. South Carolina residents produce about 5 million tons of garbage a year and import about 1.4 million tons.

Those attending Tuesday's hearing included three members of the Pee Dee Indian Tribe of South Carolina, who

dressed in full ceremonial regalia to make their point against the landfill.

James Caulder, who identified himself as the chief of the tribe, said the proposed Marlboro County landfill would be less than 10 miles from the Pee Dee's historic tribal grounds.

"We used to have beautiful streams, beautiful woods — and we lived free," Caulder said before the meeting. "Trying to find a place today where there is no contamination is hard. We don't need to be having any more mega-dumps or any other dumps that's going to be contributing to the problem."

Representatives of the S.C. Coastal Conservation League and Upstate Forever also spoke in favor of the ban, as did businessman J.W. Yount. Yount owns a fiberglass recycling plant near Aiken, but said many companies choose to dump toxics-laden fiberglass in landfills because it is so cheap. Fiberglass doesn't break down easily in the environment.

"It's time for South Carolina to say 'No More. We are not going to be the South's dumping ground anymore,'" Yount said. "I am from North Carolina — and I know why people come to South Carolina: Because they can dump on you."

Reach Fretwell at (803) 771-8537.

---

© 2009 TheState.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved. <http://www.thestate.com>