

Memorandum (Confidential)

From: Dr. Richard Lipsky

To: Kate Ascher, Executive Vice President, EDC

Subject: Food Waste Disposers and New York's Municipal Garbage Crisis

Date: 12/22/03

What follows is an analysis of the kinds of benefits we believe can accrue to the city through a policy of comprehensive installation of food waste disposers in both residences and commercial food establishments. The cost side of the equation is problematic since DEP, the agency that is in charge of all sewer and waste water treatment infrastructure, has consistently failed to analyze this crucial variable in any of our communications with the agency or in its public testimony before the City Council.

The need for such a cost-benefit analysis is timely given the well-publicized collapse of the city's effort to come up with a cost effective waste disposal methodology. Such an analysis, however, necessarily needs to transcend any particular agency purview and, globally rather than parochially, examine all of the alternative methodologies from a fiscal as well as an environmental perspective. Given this need it is crucial for the administration to take a thorough look at the way in which food waste disposers can dramatically answer some of the major issues involved in municipal waste removal.

One point in particular deserves emphasis. In its lengthy and rather critical review of the city's waste problems, *The New York Times* quoted the mayor on the issue of truck traffic. In July of 2002 he had vowed to stop trash hauling truck traffic because, "We are not going to continue to give our kids lung disease, no matter what the cost is ... That's the bottom line." There is no question that disposers will accomplish this major mayoral objective in rather dramatic fashion and, as the following outline highlights, it will create other opportunities for improving the city's environmental health as well. We believe that it will be able to do this while simultaneously saving the city hundreds of millions of dollars in yearly disposal costs.

Benefits of Food Waste Disposers

- 1) **Clean up the neighborhood stores** – Organic garbage, ground and flushed through the sewer infrastructure, will eliminate the veritable food waste feast that rats and insects feed on;
- 2) **Reduced truck traffic** – A typical supermarket will see its three times a week pickup reduced to once a week with the accompanying benefits of dramatic noise reduction and emission control;
- 3) **Reduced exports** – The grinding of commercial food waste (over 60% of a store's current garbage weight) will significantly reduce the amount and weight of exported garbage. In addition, once organic contaminants are removed from the commercial waste stream, over 95% of the remaining garbage will be recycled and, as a result;

- 4) **Reduced transfer station activity** – The reduction of commercial garbage and the concomitant increase of recycling will have a major impact on the amount of private transfer station business. The work that remains, recycling activity, will also be significantly less noxious to the surrounding neighborhoods where the stations are located.

Residential Food Waste Disposers

The pursuit of the legalization of commercial food waste disposers should go hand-in-glove with the legislative effort to mandate residential disposers (Intro). In many ways the residential side is even more compelling given the fact that the mayor is looking a \$1 billion disposal dilemma with no end in sight. In this area the following points are crucial:

- 1) **Reduction of Export** – It is costing us around \$85 a ton just to export residential waste. This does not factor in the cost of collection. Together, the total cost runs about \$245 per ton. In theory, a full residential penetration of food waste disposers can reduce collected garbage anywhere from 40 – 50%. The resulting savings to the city, under current costs which everyone knows will only escalate, will range from \$1,176,000 a day to 1,470,000 a day (From \$429,240,000 to \$536,550,000 a year);
- 2) **Enhanced Public Health** – The city's Department of Health, in conjunction with NYCHA, has already embarked on a pilot program of installing grinders in selected housing projects. The rationale, as we would expect, is that controlling the rat epidemic can only be achieved through eliminating as much

as possible the rodent's food supply. In the Baruch Houses on the Lower East Side the pilot has been successful and a reduction of garbage disposed has also been noted. NYCHA is now expanding the pilot to Brooklyn;

- 3) **Reduction of Truck Traffic** – Just as with the commercial use, the residential installation will lead to a significant reduction of sanitation truck traffic currently picking up the waste but, in addition, will also generate an equally dramatic reduction in the tractor trailer traffic that is taking municipal garbage to out of state landfills;
- 4) **Reduction of Transfer Station Activity** - The mayor's original plan for the construction of eight marine transfer stations would cost the city tens of millions, if not hundreds of millions of dollars. The mandating of residential disposers would not only reduce the amount of garbage going through the municipal solid waste system, it would also dramatically change its character. With most of the putrescibles removed the noxious nature of the garbage will be severely mitigated. In fact, the removal of such contaminants will lead to the following benefit;
- 5) **Enhancement of Recycling** – The removal of organic waste should allow the reduced number of municipal transfer stations to be transformed into material recycling centers where commingled paper, plastic and cardboard is separated for re-sale. This should lead to the increase in the actual tonnage of material recycled but in addition could very well also lead to the elimination of the

expensive curbside program which would, under these new conditions, be completely duplicative and wasteful and;

- 6) **Keeping Technology Simple** – The administration is looking at every possible high technology solution to the garbage disposal crisis. We know, however, from past experience that there exists a high level of popular suspicion concerning the impacts of many of these technological approaches. In particular, when incineration was proposed 15 years ago it unleashed a public hysteria.

Garbage grinders are a successfully tested and simple technology. While we know that their use will create a burden on both the sewer infrastructure and the city's waste water treatment plants, it is a problem that can be managed. Unlike export, which depends on the whims of private carters and the needs of out-of-state communities, this methodology would be totally within New York City's purview. Its costs can be predicted and, as a result, are manageable.

The mayor has made his fortune on the creative use of technology. Now, however, he is threatened with appearing foolish because he can't figure out a cost-effective technique to simply throw out of the city's garbage. If presented to him properly, commercial and residential food waste disposers can be viewed as the simplest and most fiscally responsible garbage solution.