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# Taxpayers Face Landfill Costs

## Cleanup May Hit \$50 Million

BY COLLEEN HEILD  
*Journal Staff Writer*

Environmental cleanups of the city's nine closed landfills may cost up to \$50 million over the next 10 years and taxpayers or water and garbage customers could be asked to pick up the tab.

That was the warning Monday night from Sarah Kotchian the director of the city's Environmental Health Department, who advised a City Council committee that the city needs to come up with a way to foot the bill.

Her department in a report to councilors proposed alternatives such as increasing garbage or water rates, imposing a 1/16-cent municipal gross receipts tax, or increasing so-called "tipping fees" at the solid waste convenience centers.

"We do need a permanent funding source," Kotchian said, "because we will continue to come forward with needs for the next 10 years."

Federal requirements now mandate that liners be installed in landfills to protect against contamination of groundwater and drinking water.

The nine closed city landfills predate those requirements, and "substantial contamination" has been found at the former Los Angeles landfill, now the site of Balloon Fiesta Park, Kotchian told the council's Finance

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# Cleanup Could Cost \$50 Million

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mittee.  
The city's projected cost for cleaning up the Los Angeles landfill is now estimated to be from \$3 million to \$5 million, Kotchian said. She said the cleanup costs at the city's landfills, some which are 45 years old, may vary as the city assesses the extent and type of contamination through monitoring studies.  
"We don't have the long term estimate, but it could be as high as \$50 million," Kotchian said. The more likely estimate would be \$20 million, she said. But if the

problem is as extensive as has been discovered at the Los Angeles landfill, she said the price tag would be \$20 million higher.

The news irritated Councilor Vickie Perea, who noted that Mayor Martin Chavez's 1996-97 budget proposal didn't set up a special funding mechanism to start saving for the cleanups.

Perea said the administration only asked for \$500,000 in the upcoming fiscal year for cleanup related work. She said it appeared the administration was putting the council "behind the eight ball" in figuring out where to obtain the bulk of the funding.

But Deputy Chief Administrative

Officer Vickie Fisher told Perea, "It's going to be a couple of years down the road before we know what our real liability is."

Fisher said at that time the city might have to "take some extraordinary action outside the budget... whether it be a special tax or something else."

Imposing a 1/16-cent tax could yield up to \$5.5 million a year to address environmental compliance issues, according to the report from Kotchian's department.

Chief Administrative Officer Lawrence Rael urged councilors last week against any reduction in current garbage rates, citing the potential cleanup costs the city

could face.

Another council committee, however, voted to endorse lowering garbage rates by 18 cents a month which would decrease city revenues by about \$260,000 a year. The council is expected to vote on the issue April 15.

Kotchian said her agency meanwhile is trying to get private companies in Albuquerque to comply with their own environmental cleanups.

"We're really under a microscope," she said. "Some of the businesses we've asked to clean up waste have turned around and asked, 'What's the city doing about its own problem?'"