



ALBUQUERQUE JOURNAL

(T.M. PEPPERDAY, Publisher 1926-1956 H.P. PICKRELL, Editor 1926-1964)

(C. THOMPSON LANG, Publisher 1956-1971)

T.H. LANG, Publisher
An Independent Newspaper

Published at Journal Center, 7777 Jefferson NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109-4343, by the Journal Publishing Co.
Reprint of this masthead prohibited

Gerald J. Crawford, *Senior Editor*

Kent Walz, *Editor*

A10

Thursday, April 11, 1996

EDITORIALS

City Should Resist Digging Up Landfills

Sarah Kotchian, director of the city's Environmental Health Department, is advising a City Council committee it should start looking for funding sources to raise up to \$50 million to finance anticipated environmental cleanup of the city's old landfills.

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

This administration has already raised water rates to finance water conservation efforts, with both the hike and the efforts likely to cut residential consumption — thereby reducing revenues, potentially necessitating further rate increases to cover costs. While people can reduce their consumption of water, there is no practical alternative to continuing to buy from the city.

However, the same isn't true of solid waste disposal. If the city makes it too expensive to use the city landfill, many will use other — illegal — alternatives, creating the obvious environmental contamination of trash dumped in arroyos and on the mesa.

The city's projected cost for cleaning up the Los Angeles landfill, one already suspected of causing "substantial contamination," according to Kotchian, is estimated to be from \$3 million to \$5 million.

We may end up facing the draconian cleanup costs predicted by Kotchian, but that's not justification for imposing a tax now to accumulate a nest egg in anticipation of future contingencies. Sufficient unto today are the unfilled public needs we already face.

Protecting groundwater supplies from contamination from old landfills is certainly a problem. In balancing risk with cost, however, the city — and ultimately the federal Environmental Protection Agency — will have to demonstrate that the environmental threat is sufficiently serious to justify the increased costs their cleanup would require. As the cost of using landfills goes up, the amount of waste, toxic and benign, that ends up illegally dumped in the countryside will go up as well.

Digging up and reburying old dumps is a practice that should be discouraged in all but the most serious environmental circumstances.