
Solid Waste Management on Indian Reservations:
Limitations of Conventional Solid Waste Management
Engineering

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in
Environmental Engineering

in the
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

1999

ABSTRACT

Solid waste management (SWM) practices and facilities on Indian Reservations are 20 to 40 years behind that of conventional urban and suburban communities in the U.S. Obstacles tribes face in carrying out sound solid waste management are examined in this study. The precepts of conventional solid waste management engineering are reviewed and found to be of limited use in describing or solving the situation confronting tribes. Conventional SWM inherently assumes conventional western-industrialist culture, governmental authority, and resource availability. But cultural, social, jurisdictional, and program infrastructural issues impacting SWM exist that differentiate reservation circumstances from those of a conventional community. For the first time, these obstacles are described systematically to understand underlying causes of tribal SWM difficulties and, by extension, problems with tribal environmental management in general. Based on the limitations for tribal communities in carrying out conventional SWM, it is pointed out that a universal SWM framework should be viewed as a set of basic program components, set within a community context that is crucial to how the program components should be implemented. The conclusion of the study is that tribal sovereignty, with its related issues of cultural integrity, legal authority, and economic self-determination, is the context of reservations, and the fundamental force driving tribal SWM decisions. Further, the goal of sound and efficient reservation SWM in the long-term is best achieved, and in some cases only realized, with a definition, recognition, and strengthening of tribal sovereignty throughout the reservation, including fee lands, and regardless of tribal membership. Federal, state and local, and tribal policies should reflect this finding.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ac	acre
ATNI	Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest Indians
NTEC	National Tribal Environmental Coalition
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs
CAA	Clean Air Act
CERCLA	Comprehensive Environmental Recovery Compensation and Liability Act
CWA	Clean Water Act
CSWM	conventional solid waste management
d	day
DOI	Department of Interior
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FIFRA	Federal Insecticide Fungicide and Rodenticide Act
FIP	federal Indian policy
ft	foot
gal	gallon
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
IIHS	Indian Health Service
b	pound
mi	mile
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
SDWA	Surface Drinking Water Act
SWD	solid waste disposal
SWDA	Solid Waste Disposal Act
SWM	solid waste management
TAS	Treatment as a state
y	year
yd ³	cubic yard

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What a long strange trip its been...

To family,

I am blessed.

To Peter

Thanks for taking the journey with me; you taught me much.

To friends,

I only get by with a little help from my friends.

