

Recycling error prompts staff change

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The coordinator of the city's curbside recycling program has been reassigned after almost 100 tons of recyclables were taken to a landfill last week, staff members told City Council on Thursday.

That mistake cost the city \$11,400, said the staffers, who also admitted such reusable materials have been taken to the landfill on 10 other occasions.

"Obviously, this was a mistake, an error in judgment, and we immediately took steps to correct it," City Manager Alex Briseno told the council. "We don't want to lose faith with the citizens."

Public Works Director John German said his goal continued to be to operate the best recycling program in the country.

"We did something wrong, and that's going to set us back," German said. "We apologize to you (the council) and to the citizens of San Antonio for those errors."

German also said he reassigned the woman responsible for last week's decision to throw away items collected on the North Side.

Acting recycling coordinator Bonita Turner has been transferred to another administrative position in the solid waste division of the Public Works Department and is to be in charge of planning the department's annual Christmas tree recycling program.

In the meantime, solid waste manager P.G. Mendez is to oversee the curbside recycling program, and German said the acting coordinator's position is to remain vacant until a suitable candidate for the job is found.

Since the first phase of a three-year citywide recycling program began in late July, solid waste crews have dumped an estimated 40 tons of paper, plastic and aluminum cans in landfills on 10 occasions, German said. To prevent any more recycling material from being thrown away, German said bins had been added at a collection station by Vista Fibers, the company that disposes of the recyclables, and crews have been instructed to find a place to hold the material in the event the bins are full.

Other long-range modifications also may be considered, he said. German said 90 tons of recyclable material was not sorted when collected Dec. 2 to save time after nearly double the normal amount was picked up that day. The large volume was attributed no pick up the previous week due to Thanksgiving.

The materials were deposited in the Texas Disposal Systems landfill in southern Travis County.

Another 10 tons of material was collected Dec. 3 before a local television reporter revealed the mistake. German said he halted the disposal activity immediately.

Additional material that had been collected was taken to a slab at the closed Nelson Gardens municipal landfill and sorted by about 50 solid waste employees on Saturday and Sunday, German said.

Mayor Nelson Wolff commended Briseno and German for their attitude and said: "Now we need to move on." Councilman Lyle Larson, however, was furious. Many of the recycling neighborhoods are in his Northeast Side district.

"I am disgusted by this fiasco," he said. "To breach the confidence of the public -

that is something I cannot tolerate. I don't care what they do with it (in the future), but do not put it in the landfill."

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