

# Metro

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Wednesday, March 15, 1995

## Plan for Frio landfill dumped

### 3 counties pull plug on proposal in squabble over split of ownership

By Matt Flores  
and Susie Phillips Gonzalez  
Express-News Staff Writers

DEVINE — Officials from three counties pulled the plug Tuesday on a proposed regional landfill in Frio County to receive garbage from San Antonio, saying the plan was killed because parties couldn't agree on an ownership split.

"At this time it's dead, and I don't ever see it being rekindled," said Atascosa County Commissioner Tommy Shearrer, a mem-

ber of the AFM Tri-County Solid Waste Management Agency.

The agency was to have developed the project in partnership with San Antonio.

"We reached an impasse: They wanted to control, but we didn't want to give that control — and they didn't feel comfortable with that," said Shearrer, who was named board chairman at Tuesday's meeting.

The planned landfill, officially called the South Texas Regional

Environmental Enterprise Zone, would have been built on a 5,000-acre ranch near Moore, about 40 miles south of San Antonio.

Two of three San Antonio city councilmen serving on an ad-hoc committee to negotiate a management deal with the three counties said they would narrow the focus to Frio County, where the ranchland is located, and try to work out an agreement unilaterally.

"Our point was to try to work with Frio County independent of

the other counties," Councilman Lyle Larson said.

Pledges of free or reduced cost service to Frio County residents and job opportunities apparently were not enough to overcome what Larson agreed was the "deal-killer": the ownership question.

"I guess the pot wasn't sweet enough," he said.

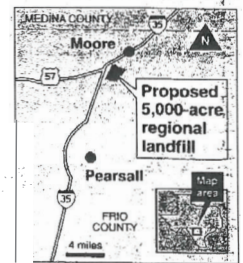
Added Councilman Roger Perez: "I'm optimistic that there's merit to that site and look forward to seeing if the city, in conjunction with

the host county, can work something out."

In a letter informing Mayor Nelson Wolff that AFM was breaking off negotiations, incoming chairman J.M. Lindsey, a Frio County commissioner, said the agency would vigorously oppose any attempts to develop a landfill in the three-county area unless the counties were participating.

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See **DISAGREEMENT/7B**

# Disagreement over ownership split leads counties to scuttle dump plan

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"All are interested," German said.

The landfill was expected to cost between \$25 million and \$50 million, and was to meet waste disposal needs for the region for 50 to 75 years.

But the tri-county agency, which has nine board members from Atascosa, Frio and Medina counties, voted unanimously against it Tuesday morning.

At issue was a proposed 50-50 ownership split. San Antonio officials, citing a larger financial liability in the venture, said they wanted a larger percentage of ownership, as much as 90 percent.

But officials from the rural counties complained that they wanted to retain at least 50 percent of the ownership, in effect, ensuring their counties would have equal control of the landfill.

"Essentially, what San Antonio wanted was a hole in the ground in Frio County, and all the amenities and the job creation would've been done on the South Side of San Antonio at their transfer station," said Lindsey, a previous AFM board chairman.

"All we would've got was a hole in the ground and 10 or 15 jobs," Lindsey added.

Rural officials also balked at San Antonio's proposal to provide interim funds to purchase the site. Under that plan, the counties wouldn't have assumed any ownership until after the funds were repaid.



Atascosa County Commissioner Tommy Shearrer was named chairman of a 3-county agency Tuesday.

In the letter to Wolff, the board also said: "No, sir, Mr. Mayor, AFM didn't back down, we walked away 'cause that gift horse was fixin' to die in our back yard, and those bigger-than-life vultures were circling overhead, just waiting to pick it apart."

Tuesday's announcement didn't come as much of a surprise to rural county or San Antonio officials. In a meeting last month in San Antonio, officials abruptly cut off their 2½-hour session after neither side would capitulate on the ownership issue.

AFM officials said they would pursue other options to address the region's waste management needs.

And, they said, it won't be cheap.

"We're back to Square 1," said board member Weldon Cude, another Atascosa County commissioner.

In the meantime, he said, the rural counties will continue to contract with a private company for their garbage collection. Ironically, most of the waste generated from the three rural counties is hauled to San Antonio.

"Private enterprise can raise

their rates tomorrow, and we're sitting here having to choke them down — and there's nothing we can do about it," Cude said.

Private companies also will continue to function as the final resting place for San Antonio's garbage for the next 8½ years under existing contracts, German said.

"The city is in fairly good shape for landfill disposal," German said. "We are not in a crisis stage."

"Now that we're not in a crisis is the time for us to make arrangements for long-term provisions of our solid waste," Councilman Howard Peak said. "We can't stop working on this issue just because the tri-county group has folded."

Peak said his top priority will be to secure a site that will serve the city's landfill needs for 50 years or longer, rather than turning over long-term operations to a private company.

"The landfill business is a very volatile industry," Peak said. "We don't know what might be coming in future years, and we want the city to be in control as much as possible without having to rely on a private firm or firms."

Former Councilman Weir Labatt, who chaired a citizen committee that recommended the Frio County site, said the fact remains that all the communities involved in the previous process still have a need for landfill space.

"It sounds like it's not the site (that was a problem), but the working agreement," Labatt said. "The concept of a REEZ is a valid one and has to be pursued."

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