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Contact: Anne Sayers, WI League of Conservation Voters, (608) 661-0845
Charlene Lemoine, Waukesha County Environmental Action League, (262) 574-7568
Keith Reopelle, Clean Wisconsin, (608) 251-7020

This Earth Day, Wisconsin Gets Trashed Deadline to Limit Out-of-State Waste Passes, Citizens Ask ‘Why?’

Madison – Even as Wisconsin citizens celebrate Earth Day, the deadline to move forward a bill to limit out-of-state waste has passed. As of today, AB 798, the bill intended to stem the record-setting influx of trash from neighboring states, has died in committee, despite widespread public support from across the state for its passage.

Since 2003, there has been a 46 percent increase in the amount of out-of-state waste dumped into Wisconsin landfills due to our exceptionally low tipping fee. Wisconsin charges only \$3 per ton of garbage dumped in a landfill, while neighboring states charge far more. Minnesota, for example, charges \$13 per ton.

Citizens were optimistic earlier this legislative session when AB798, a bill that increased tipping fees to \$10 per ton, was introduced in the state legislature. If enacted, the bill was expected to decrease out-of-state waste by 50%. AB 798 has been stuck in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee since October 2005. The Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on February 15 and citizens from Saronia, Racine, Green Bay, and Waukesha drove all the way to Madison to express their frustration with the increased pollution, odors, and truck traffic that out-of-state waste brings into their communities. With the end of the legislative session just two weeks away, today marks the last day that Committee Chairman, Representative Scott Gunderson could have allowed the bill to get a vote.

“It is very disappointing to see a bill with so much public support be killed in committee. This bill would limit dependence on landfills, reduce out-of-state waste and increase funding to communities for recycling. Do our state legislators *want* Wisconsin to be known as the dumping ground of the Midwest?” questioned Waukesha County Environmental Action League Waste Issues Representative, Charlene Lemoine, who was one of dozens of citizens who testified in favor of the bill at the public hearing in February.

Garbage from neighboring states can now be found in landfills across Wisconsin. For example, Minnesota trash can be found in Milwaukee suburbs. Illinois trash is as far

north as Dodge and Jefferson counties. Dane County has accepted waste from Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota. Washburn and Rusk counties have accepted waste all the way from Michigan. Recent data indicates that neighboring states will continue to take advantage of Wisconsin's low tipping fees to ship waste into Wisconsin, which will put groundwater and communities at risk.

The increased tipping fee proposal quickly gained traction with Wisconsin citizens who fear the health impacts and financial costs of more landfills. "After such overwhelming support for the bill at the public hearing from citizens, I fully expected the committee to move it forward. I'm bitterly disappointed to see that the waste lobbyists in their dark suits trumped our concerns of health and public safety," said Jenifer Lugar, a Sarona resident who has spent the last three years opposing an expansion of the BFI landfill in Washburn County, which that takes in more than 80% of its waste from Minnesota and Michigan.

Landfills are known to contaminate air and drinking water supplies with pollutants such as cyanide, mercury, dioxins, and lead. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that even today's engineered landfills have an eighty-two percent failure rate, posing a permanent threat to our groundwater supplies.

"There is something somewhat ironic and certainly sad that the state that founded Earth Day has done nothing to limit the polluting waste that is flowing across our borders," said Anne Sayers, Program Director for the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters.

"The session may be over, but we haven't heard the last of this issue. With bipartisan legislative support and the overwhelming support of Wisconsin citizens, a bill to limit out-of-state waste has a great shot at becoming law next session," said Jennifer Giegerich, State Director of WISPIRG.

For more information on solid waste, please see the Wisconsin Conservation Briefing Book 2005-2006 at <http://www.conservationvoters.org/brbk05/index.shtml> or view a map of where the waste comes from and how it is dispersed at <http://www.conservationvoters.org/docs/pr/trash/>.

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Wisconsin Solid Waste Facts

Reliance on landfills threatens human health by impairing air and water quality.

Landfills are the number one source of human-made methane, a critical greenhouse gas, as well as the source of “leachate,” a toxic liquid that will eventually seep into the groundwater under every landfill ever built. Leaky landfills contaminate air and drinking water supplies with pollutants like cyanide, mercury, dioxins, and lead. Even today’s “engineered” landfills have an 82 percent failure rate, posing a permanent threat to our ground water supplies.

Wisconsin’s influx of out-of-state waste is not likely to diminish in the future without an increased tipping fee.

Private trash haulers have ramped up capacity by more than 64 million tons as of January 2005 in anticipation of even greater volumes of out-of-state waste coming into Wisconsin landfills. Minnesota, for example, expects their own waste volumes to double from 5.9 million tons to 9.1 million tons in the next ten years. With few new landfills or expansions being approved in Minnesota, most of that additional waste will likely find its way into Wisconsin landfills. Illinois is also facing a landfill capacity crisis, with skyrocketing land values and strong community opposition for new landfill construction, which will place added pressure on Wisconsin’s landfill capacity.

Increased tipping fees will reduce out-of-state waste.

Importing municipal waste into Wisconsin is a bargain at present due to a combination of low tipping fees and plentiful landfill capacity. This effectively allows neighboring states to “offload” the environmental and financial liabilities of waste management, including some of their dirtiest waste, on Wisconsin communities. A more competitive tipping fee for waste disposal is the only constitutionally viable option left to counter an increasing flow of waste from neighboring states. According to a recent UW-Green Bay study, an increase in the tipping fee to \$10 per ton (\$7 more than the current fee) could provide a 50 percent reduction in out-of-state waste disposal. The increase would make Wisconsin’s tipping fee more competitive to other states, such as Minnesota (\$13/ton), eliminating the economic incentive for haulers to truck waste here.

Increased tipping fees will provide tax relief for Wisconsin citizens and growth for the state’s economy.

Currently, taxpayers are paying for nearly 72 percent of recycling programs through property taxes. A tipping fee increase from \$3 to \$10 on each ton of waste will generate an additional \$44-54 million in revenue. Nearly all of that additional revenue would go right back to local communities, fully funding local recycling programs that are currently being subsidized by property taxes. The tipping fee increase will reward communities that actively implement robust, innovative recycling programs and businesses with tax relief, increased job opportunities, and revenue from new reuse and resource recovery enterprises. It will also protect taxpayers from the looming costs attributed with cleaning up landfills in the years ahead.