

The Anti-People's Ordinance

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By Murtaza Baxamusa

An average San Diegan generates eight pounds of trash a day. You get a black container that you put out to the curb every week. If you're disabled or have trouble getting the can to the right spot, the guy in the orange uniform helps you out.

The truck itself is part of a pioneering effort to reduce greenhouse gases. It follows a route through the neighborhood meticulously calculated by GIS technology, with the drivers' input, to maximize speed and efficiency. The trash truck then goes to Miramar Landfill, the first municipally-operated landfill in the nation to earn international certification.

Your trash is then compacted and composted in a lined pit with environmental quality controls and an innovative process of re-vegetation with native plants.

The city of San Diego's trash collection service was awarded the national "Vocational Fleet of the Year" in 2005. Single-family homes in the city are served by this dedicated work force that picks up their trash reliably, efficiently, and courteously.

As a result, the city has a particularly low rate of customer complaints and state violations.

All of which is paid for by property taxes and sales taxes. In San Diego, unlike most other California cities, these revenues must stretch to cover trash as well as police, fire, parks and libraries.

Single-family residences in other major cities in the state pay fees of between \$16 and \$77 per month for trash pickup, in addition to their taxes. They also often get charged for how heavy the container is and how large it is.

As a result, the average Californian generates five and a half pounds of trash a day, much better for Mother Nature than the San Diegan's eight pounds.

Generating trash is a bargain in San Diego. Unlike in other cities, we aren't charged extra for how far the container is from the curb, how high the truck has to lift it up, or if the alley is too steep or narrow.

The recent Grand Jury Report states the obvious, what any outsider to the world of San Diego politics would conclude at first blush -- that the city needs to raise revenues for services it provides. A 2005 study by the Center on Policy Initiatives, *The Bottom Line*, established that the city raises the least general revenue per household, in relation to income, among all major cities in California. This is a structural problem that predated the Wall Street and pension problems, and led to the city's inability to raise revenues for the level of services residents desire.

Further, the Grand Jury report raises the issue of equity. All residents pay property and sales taxes although these funds are used to provide trash pickup only for single-family residences.

An interesting angle is that poorer residents (who live in rental apartments) are subsidizing richer residents (who live in single-family homes).

Almost half of San Diegans are renters. Why is the city excluding multifamily units from benefiting from the award-winning trash service that single-family units receive? If condos and apartments had the option of city-provided trash pickup, this would competitively drive down the cost of commercial pickup, which would in turn lower rents and homeowner association fees. It would also benefit the city, and the taxpayers, since multifamily pickup is typically cheaper per unit, due to an economy of scale.

As our economy recovers, there is a grassroots movement brewing towards the repeal of the Anti-People's Ordinance that rewarded waste, taxed the needy, and made us nearly bankrupt.

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