



Jan. 30, 2012

Local landfill has alternative idea to Austin plastic bag ban

As the Austin City Council ponders whether to ban all plastic retail bags, one of the largest landfills in Central Texas may have come up with a compromise.

In far southeast Travis County lies the destination for your trash - the Texas Disposal Systems landfill in Creedmoor processes 3,000 tons of garbage a day.

Within that refuse are a lot of lightweight plastic bags. Numerous fences on the property are designed to catch the bags before they get away.

Adam Gregory helps run the facility.

"Currently we don't make any money on the recycling of plastic bags because they are so difficult to take out of the stream, and cause more problems than they're worth," said Gregory.

Environmentalists want to ban the bags from Austin. Monday night another public forum was held at City Hall to discuss the pros and cons of such a ban.

But as menacing as the bags can be, even Gregory doesn't believe an all-out ban is right answer.

"I think an alternative would be to get all film plastics, not just the retail plastic bags, into the recycling facility and into a product that can be sold, as opposed to an all out ban," said Gregory.

"Film plastics" include not only retail bags, but bags for bread, newspapers, and dry cleaning.

"They can be recycled, the problem is getting enough of them in one place," said Gregory.

Gregory wants consumers to be armed with a heavy plastic pillowcase of sorts, which they could stuff with all film plastics. When full, consumers would place that in the recycling bin.

"If they came through the recycling system in a manner that we could easily grab hundreds of bags at a time instead of one bag at a time, then it would become economical to recycle the material," said Gregory. "We think we could design something unique for Austin and set an example."

If the city council approves the ban, it would be phased in over the next two years.