

CONCERNS AND FEARS

Q: Will PAYT result in problems with illegal dumping?

A: Experience in towns similar to Lexington provides evidence that illegal dumping should not be a problem. In one survey only 20% of towns report an increase in illegal dumping after PAYT (while 6% reported a decrease). Problems tended to be transient, occurring only in the first few months when people's habits were changing. The convenience of curbside PAYT, the use of a "hybrid" system in which there are no non-subscribers, and the inconvenience (and risk) of illegal dumping appear to be effective in preventing problems. The PAYT Implementation Plan will have provisions for responding to any illegal dumping that does occur.

Q: I remember that Lexington had problems with illegal dumping before we implemented our current trash system. We don't want to go back to that.

A: You are referring to the period before we had townwide curbside pick-up. PAYT does not eliminate curbside pick-up.

Q: Will implementing PAYT cause people to hire private haulers to collect their trash?

A: This should not happen to any significant extent.. Under the proposed PAYT system, approximately two-thirds of the cost of disposal is already paid for through the tax levy. PAYT is a real bargain compared to hiring private haulers who typically charge more than \$450 per year for collection. The convenience of the town program also encourages participation.

Q: How can one town make a difference in the amount of pollution and the amount of trash being generated in all of Massachusetts?

A: One town by itself can only affect a small part of the statewide waste stream. But by showing our willingness to do our part to reduce waste, we provide leadership that has far-reaching effects. Lexington's efforts have already inspired recycling committees in several other towns, and have influenced statewide waste reduction coalitions and state waste management policies. With regard to PAYT, we are not trailblazers, but we can set an example that will undoubtedly be followed by other communities in eastern Massachusetts. When they reduce their waste, it multiplies the effect of our local efforts.

Q: How can more recycling reduce the amount of trash burned at the NESWC incinerator? What if they succeed in getting more trash from elsewhere?

A: Reducing the trash flow from Lexington reduces the regional pollution load regardless of how it affects any one disposal facility. It is the regional pollution load that is important to public health impacts in Lexington. If communities like Lexington do not act to halt the growth in trash, permits will be issued for additional disposal capacity in Massachusetts. [A proposal for

adding a third burner to the Saugus incinerator has already been announced.]

Q: How do we know that PAYT won't be overly complicated and inconvenient?

A: A well-designed PAYT program is simple to understand and easy to use - and that is what is proposed for Lexington. The basic PAYT idea is very simple: Just put tags on the bag you put out at curbside. Or put a label on your barrel. For most residents, this might only mean that they buy a book of tags along with their usual trash bags when they check out at the supermarket. Or that they put a barrel label on their barrel once every six months. It is expected that tags and labels would be sold at a number of local businesses.

Q: Isn't tax-supported trash collection an expected service in a first-class town like Lexington?

A: More and more towns with innovative, effective governments seem to be concluding that 100% taxpayer subsidy for trash disposal is a mistake. PAYT programs, which provide excellent trash services with only partial taxpayer subsidy, appear to be the way of the future. Implementing PAYT should only enhance the reputation of Lexington as a well-run, forward-looking community.

Q: Would PAYT impose an unfair burden on low-income residents?

A: No. Low-income residents will also share in the overall savings achieved by PAYT. And because PAYT restores some measure of individual control over the trash bill, households that need to economize to make ends meet are given the option to do so. Our current system of 100% taxpayer subsidy forces all households to fund a mandatory high level of disposal service which some households cannot afford. Because trash output tends to increase with income, the subsidies are skewed in a regressive manner. On balance, PAYT is not disadvantageous to low income households.

Q: Will the need to discard disposable diapers each week cause PAYT to be expensive for families with young children?

A: It is important to put the costs in perspective. A child using disposable diapers is likely to use 6700 diapers while growing up. This will probably generate about 13 pounds/week of extra trash during the diaper years. If this is combined with other trash to efficiently use a single tag, the resulting PAYT tag expense would be about 65 cents per week. This is offset by the PAYT savings that accrue to the child rearing household before and after the years of diaper use. The major diapering expense of the household will be the purchase of the diapers themselves (about \$16.00/week).

Q: Will PAYT be unfair to large families?

A: The real question with families is not "fairness", - otherwise we would have to ask if it is fair to require smaller families to subsidize larger ones. More to the

point is whether a fairer system - with reduced subsidies - could be an economic hardship for larger families. Trash output is correlated more with rising income and lifestyle choices than family size. The amount of unavoidable trash generated by larger families is not great enough to impose a hardship. In fact, if a family is careful with its trash, even large families can realize a net savings under PAYT.

Q: Will PAYT be good for senior citizens?

A: Since senior citizens tend to have very modest trash output, they are currently subsidizing other households. The great majority of senior citizens will see their trash disposal expenses go down with PAYT, since they will come closer to paying only for the limited services they require.

Q: Will the Town have people inspecting my curbside trash?

A: No. But the collection truck personnel will be required to verify that the bags and barrels they handle have the required PAYT tags or labels

Q: Will I be paying twice the same service - once through taxes and once when I buy tags?

A: No. You only pay once. The difference with PAYT is that the total cost of waste management is divided between the tax levy and the tags or labels you purchase.

Q: I'm worried that I won't have any tags on trash day.

A: You will start with a good supply since the first 26 tags will come from the Town in a townwide mailing. You might want to keep tags with their supply of trash bags so you can check the supply. When you buy new trash bags at the supermarket, you should pick up tags at the same time. If you don't want to bother with tags can, you can just use labels on barrels.

Q: In our neighborhood crows and dogs tear open trash bags. What will PAYT do about this?

A: This is a problem that exists independently of PAYT. If you have problems with animals, try putting your trash in barrels.

Q: Normally I don't have much trash. But when I clean out my basement I have almost 8 bags of trash. Won't PAYT make this expensive for me?

A: To get the right answer regarding costs for you, it's important to think in terms of your average trash output, not the unusual peaks. In all those weeks in which you do not clean out your basement, PAYT will produce savings for you because you are not subsidizing other people who are generating large amounts of trash. You may use \$16 in tags on the week that you clean your basement, but when averaged over the year this amounts to only 31 cents per week. If your year-long average trash output is moderate, you will save money with PAYT.

Q: I thought Lexington already had a good waste management program. How do we know there is room for improvement with PAYT?

A: Five towns in Massachusetts recently went to PAYT and provided a full year's worth of data for analysis. Their average reduction in per capita waste generation was 38%. Lexington generates 0.38 tons per capita while the five PAYT towns averaged 0.20 tons per capita. We don't know exactly how well we can do, but there is room for substantial improvement.

Q: Under PAYT, won't people just buy trash compactors in order to stuff more trash into each bag?

A: Under PAYT, there will be a 30 pound weight limit for each bag. This will prevent excessive compaction. Filling each bag right up to the weight limit is a permitted way to reduce the number of tags you use, although we know from experience that most people will not bother to do this. People generally respect the weight limits. In a survey of 46 Maine towns with PAYT, only 3 had noted problems with overweight bags.

Q: Under PAYT will people just compact their trash rather than actually reducing waste?

A: Some compaction will occur, but the evidence is clear that trash compaction poses no threat to the success of PAYT programs. PAYT typically results in over 25% reduction in the total weight of trash sent to incinerators despite any compaction that occurs.

Q: Will houses that use trash compactors have an unfair advantage over houses without trash compactors?

A: Any household that compacts trash or uses larger bags will save a little more money. Such actions are not necessary in order to save money with PAYT. And under PAYT, the variation in cost-per-pound between households is much fairer than in the current system in which one house can put out ten times more trash than another without paying any more.

Q: I undertook a home renovation project and had to throw out a lot of trash. Won't PAYT discourage such home renovation projects?

A: The cost of PAYT tags will almost certainly be a small fraction of the expense of such projects. The PAYT approach assumes that it is appropriate for people who are generating such trash to pay a little more for its disposal rather than expecting households that are not renovating to fully subsidize disposal costs of the renovation. There are many opportunities (in the design, materials selection, and purchasing phases) to reduce the amount of trash generated during construction projects. It is expected that PAYT will cause a little more attention to be given at such times to reducing trash generation.

Q: Will PAYT cause residents to use more plastic bags in setting out trash? If so, isn't this an environmental problem?

A: Under PAYT some residents will use more bags but many will use less (since under PAYT residents tend to put more trash in each bag). We are not yet sure how PAYT will affect the total number of bags used. Since a typical trash bag weighs about 1 ounce, even if half the households in Lexington put out an extra plastic bag each week, this would increase trash tonnage by less than one-tenth of one percent. This is relatively insignificant compared to the 23% tonnage reduction expected from PAYT and is less than the plastic tonnage removed by increased recycling and decreased use of disposable products.

Q: Does the incinerator need our high-BTU leaves and newspapers to get a good burn temperature?

A: The incinerator operators control the burn temperature by varying the mix of residential and commercial trash, the trash feed rate, the oxygen feed, and other parameters. The input stream varies considerably in BTU content. It is not our responsibility to control this, and in fact we cannot affect it in any meaningful way.

Q: Under PAYT is there the danger that people will burn trash in the fireplace, causing air pollution?

A: This has not been cited as a problem in communities similar to Lexington that have adopted PAYT. Trash burning is more likely to be seen in rural communities where households have traditionally been encouraged to burn their trash in backyard barrels. Burning trash in fireplaces is inconvenient, unpleasant, and causes a hazard of chimney fires. The most burnable materials (paper and yard waste) can be recycled for free. Most non-recyclables (A chicken carcass? Styrofoam?) would be difficult and unpleasant to burn in a dwelling. Since burning only reduces weight by about half, a homeowner would have to dispose of about 30 pounds of messy ash in order to save \$2.00 on PAYT tags.

PAYT will provide Lexington residents with convenient, legal, and relatively inexpensive curbside trash collection, which is an effective alternative to trash burning. The Lexington Fire Department and chimney sweepers already warn fireplace owners not to burn trash in their fireplaces. The PAYT education program will also warn against such burning, and this effort should be able to reduce any such burning that currently occurs due to lack of understanding of the dangers.

Q: Isn't it better for people to send their trash to the incinerator than dispose of it themselves?

A: Of course. But those are not the options before us. Under PAYT, all trash set out at curbside will still be sent to the incinerator. The question concerns the total tonnage that we generate. It is better, for the environment and for the taxpayer, to recycle, compost and reduce waste as much as possible. This reduces the

total trash tonnage we send to the incinerator and produces cost savings and environmental benefits.

Q: Does PAYT change our participation in NESWC? Does it determine what we do after our NESWC contract expires?

A: NESWC will exist at least until FY2005 and Lexington's NESWC contract will remain unchanged until then. Since NESWC was formed to provide public funds for the North Andover incinerator and provide it with trash, it is not clear what role NESWC will play after FY2005. At that time the contract calls for ownership of the incinerator to be transferred to Waste Management Incorporated with no reimbursement for the NESWC communities. Lexington would have to examine any post-2005 arrangements to determine if it will be in our best interests to remain a part of NESWC, deal directly with the incinerator owner, or do something else. PAYT may help us negotiate a lower cost contract after FY2005, but it does not otherwise appear to dictate our course of action.