

Green Zones Taskforce

Resourceful Debris Management

Since the storms, we have learned to look at things differently. Now we need to look at the hurricane debris, rebuilding debris and our everyday garbage with new eyes. We need to realize that “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, and a short while later, Rita, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality issued emergency orders for debris removal that treated debris largely as garbage to be dumped into landfills or burned, instead of recognizing it as a resource to be managed. These actions and orders put our health in danger, contaminated our neighborhoods and resulted in lawsuits. For the future, disaster debris (and other waste) needs to be looked on as a resource. What do we mean by the terms “debris resourcefulness.”? “Debris resourcefulness” means managing waste in ways that protect the health of people, protect our natural resources, encourage reduction, reuse, and recycling of waste, create a recycling economy, and save money for the government and citizens. Here are some examples:

CURB SIDE RECYCLING PROGRAMS

Curb side recycling programs in several Louisiana cities provide successful examples of how recycling can drastically reduce waste streams. In Baton Rouge, a strong recycling program captures almost 40% of the city’s waste, almost half of which is yard waste. Having curb side recycling in place helps preserve municipal landfill space, and creates economic relationships that can be called on and geared up in event of an emergency. Lafayette, Mandeville and Covington have active curb side recycling yet our officials in New Orleans and Jefferson claim that there is no market for recyclables and that it is too expensive.

GREEN WASTE COMPOSTING

Several Louisiana cities also have successful green waste composting programs. A public/private partnership between East Baton Rouge Parish and Natural Resources Recovery, Inc. (NRRI) allows residents to place brush piles, tree limbs, yard clippings, and Christmas trees curb side for collection and composting into premium soil mixes and mulches. The same process occurs in Lafayette. After Katrina, NRRI expanded their operation and accepted green and woody hurricane debris for composting. Jefferson, ST. Tammany and Orleans could have composting a majority of the storm green waste instead of burning. Compost can be used to re-establish plantings in neutral grounds and parks as well being valuable to local gardeners.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

ST. Tammany Parish partnered with the Sierra Club to have hazardous waste drop off events. Similar events occur in Baton Rouge and Lafayette. The most heavily affected hurricane areas have not had these opportunities. The paint, batteries, and



Demolition debris in the lower ninth ward. (4/07)

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita generated an estimated 24.6 million tons of debris, which included everything from trees and limbs and woody debris; to household goods, furniture, and cleaning products; to automobiles and boats; to white goods such as refrigerators, computers, and appliances. Now we face another 5 million tons as we rebuild.

electronic equipment needs to be collected and recycled instead of filling up our landfills.

DEMOLITION

If you choose deconstruction instead of demolition. It means that a house will be taken apart piece by piece. This enables us to isolate hazardous materials and separate reusable materials such as windows, plumbing fixtures, and architectural features. Beams can be planed for new wood floors. Deconstruction means that materials are recycled and reused on site or in another house. Homeowners need less new materials to build their house.

NEW CONSTRUCTION DEBRIS

New construction debris can be reduced by requiring contractors to recycle at least 50% of debris from their site. This encourages conservation and should reduce the cost of building. Materials can be picked up by recyclers for less money than it costs to send the same materials to a landfill. Homeowners and Contractors will benefit in the long term.

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Alternatives to Burying Debris in Landfills

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESOURCEFUL MANAGEMENT OF DISASTER DEBRIS

PLAN AHEAD

Each parish in the State of Louisiana should establish detailed plans for resourceful handling of debris. A "Debris Resourcefulness Plan" designed by the communities, the parishes and the state needs to be in place before the next one comes. This plan should include locations for staging and appropriate landfill siting. The plan needs to be well communicated to all levels of government so that everyone knows what to expect when a disaster plan has to be implemented.

MAXIMIZE REUSE AND RECYCLING

Plans should consider specific debris streams, including but not limited to household goods; household hazardous waste; white goods; cars, vehicles, and boats; concrete; and construction and demolition debris. The "Debris Resourcefulness" Plan should identify potential beneficial uses of debris streams, and should consider and outline what economic business relationships need to be in place prior to a disaster in order to maximize beneficial uses of debris after a disaster.

MINIMIZE LANDFILLS AND BURNING

If the plan is followed there should be only a small percentage of materials going to the landfills. Burning should also be kept to a minimum with the exception to make the best use of waste-processing technologies that produce clean energy, including renewable electricity and fuels.

BE READY FOR ACTION

Pre-Identify Sites

The Debris Resourcefulness Plans should pre-identify sites that facilitate rapid removal of debris as well as placement for beneficial use and recycling envisioned in the plan. In the post-hurricane period, LDEQ had to designate 343 debris management sites, including sites for staging of wood-waste, construction and demolition; boats, vehicles, and white goods; and household hazardous waste. The sites became controversial because the communities were not part of the site selection process.

Pre-Identify Business Relationships

The Debris Resourcefulness Plans should pre-identify business relationships that will be needed to make reduction, reuse, and recycling work efficiently, and should provide contract language that has been reviewed and pre-approved by department personnel for rapid execution in event of a disaster.

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Lakeview Post Katrina Debris Pile (Dec 06)



Electronic waste dropped off for recycling on St. Tammany Hazardous Waste Day

Prepare for Implementation

The Debris Resourcefulness Plans should establish a framework for implementation that includes all agencies and personnel that will be required to implement the plan. If Memoranda of Understanding will be needed, language should be established and agreed upon. The Plan should also clearly establish criteria for "debris resourcefulness" that can guide decision-making when implementing the plan.

**Citizens for a Strong
New Orleans East**

