

New Jersey wants to take out the trash

Mafia members pollute trash business, report says

By Vince Bond Jr.
WRN reporter

The state of New Jersey is used to accepting New York's trash, but this is trash of a different kind.

New Jersey's garbage and recycling industries are vulnerable to intrusion by the mob, according to a report.

The State Commission of Investigation, an independent fact-finding group that exposes organized crime, public corruption and waste in New Jersey, found that mob-affiliated individuals who were banned from operating in New York have continued to skirt the law by moving to neighboring New Jersey and exploiting loopholes there.

Although the state implemented the A-901 program in 1986 that made background checks mandatory for garbage business executives, a lack of funding and manpower for the system has allowed

criminal elements to infiltrate the lucrative waste collection industry.

There are about 1,300 licensed solid waste haulers in New Jersey and around 100 new companies apply for licensing each year.

The commission found more than 30 people in New Jersey with connections to the mob or criminal elements who were barred from the industry in New York.

Recycling operations, in particular, are susceptible to corruption because checks aren't required for operators in that sector, said Lee Seglem, assistant director of the commission.

"We're not suggesting that they're in the grip of organized crime. The issue is the vulnerability of that happening," Seglem said. "We're concerned about what's going on with contaminated soil and demolition debris falling into the hands of people who don't care about public health. There should be a licensing structure set up for that."

In some instances, the commission found that individuals who were barred from direct-partici-

pation in the waste industry, continued to profit as "commercial landlords."

To run their schemes, criminals operate behind the cover of supposedly legitimate companies, making money secondarily as real estate owners or through equipment leased to waste operations. Some also may have stakes in companies owned by relatives with clean records, according to the report.

Bruce J. Parker, president and CEO of National Solid Waste Management Association (NSWMA), said the solid waste industry consists of hardworking people, but he's concerned that some may paint it with a "broad brush stroke" because of the stereotype that the entire industry is somehow involved in organized crime.

Parker said it's an undeserved stigma.

"NSWMA supports 100% arresting criminals who are involved in the solid waste industry. We support law enforcement prosecuting people who are alleged to be in organized crime," Parker said.

Under the A-901 law, "key em-

ployees" such as owners and managers for garbage companies must fill out detailed statements about their personal and financial backgrounds and get a fingerprint check.

Thanks to a loophole, workers such as consultants and sales representatives don't get the same treatment even though they carry out key tasks, Seglem said.

The report indicated that sales reps can convert blocks of commercial clients to their company.

"There are certain types of individuals that never receive that type of scrutiny," Seglem said. "Those positions were occupied by people who had criminal backgrounds. They were using those positions to govern how a company was operating."

The report says the state should improve regulations by expanding background checks for garbage industry employees and requiring checks for those working in recycling.

It also recommends more money for law enforcement and the formation of a centralized list of

criminals banned from conducting business in New Jersey.

Monetary support for A-901 hasn't been at recommended levels since the mid-1990s, the report found.

In the last decade, funding for A-901 has dropped each year, going from \$2.7 million in the 2001 fiscal year to \$1.7 million in FY2010, which is much lower than the \$4.8 million the commission suggested more than two decades ago, the report said.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's office didn't provide a statement on the report, despite numerous calls and emails.

Carrying out detailed background checks, for example, is one area where sufficient funding is imperative.

"You need personnel dedicated to do that and it costs money," Seglem said. ■

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Waste volumes rise in 2010, but is it start of new trend?

By Jeremy Carroll
WRN reporter

After an 11.7 million ton decline in waste between 2007 and 2009, the amount of waste Americans generated in 2010 increased by 6.2 million tons, according to statistics from the U.S. EPA.

In its annual report, the EPA said Americans generated 249.86 million tons of trash in 2010, up from 243.7 million tons in 2009. It's the first increase in waste generation since 2007. The national recycling rate is also on the rise, with Americans recycling or composting 34% of their waste.

Bruce Parker, president and CEO of the National Solid Wastes Management Association, called the report a surprise.

"I don't know what the reason is for it," he said. "It has to be some increase in commercial waste. I'm not sure. But you know what, when a gift horse looks the industry in the mouth, we say thank you very much. It should only be a positive trend."

He said he can't recall such a large decline being followed by such a dramatic shift back.

The change year-over-year amounts to a 2.5% increase.

"With a small change, it's hard

to know if you have a trend or not," said John Skinner, executive director of the Solid Waste Association of North America. "There is also the question of accuracy of the data with such a small change. I would not, at this stage, read a lot into that."

He said he wants to see a second year of increases before he calls it a trend.

"The decline we saw over the last couple of years might have been a recession-oriented decline or a combination of recession and a change in material use by various sectors," he said. "But we don't know that."

Parker said many people thought that the decline of waste generation was in part due to the recession, but he also attributed it to the fact that manufacturers are now using more lightweight packaging and sustainability efforts.

"More paper is being recycled and less paper is being used," Parker said. "Everyone is using electronic devices now."

Of the waste generated in 2010, 54.3% of it was landfilled, 34% of it was recovered through recycling or composting and 11.7% of it was turned into energy at a waste-to-energy facility.

When composting is taken out



Courtesy, Komptech

The Komptech Terminator mobile single-shaft shredder processes all types of waste. The amount of waste Americans generated in 2010 rose by 6.2 million tons, the U.S. EPA said.

of the recovery figures, 25.9%, or 64.8 million tons, of the waste was recycled, according to the report. The noncompostable recycling rate was 25.2% in 2009, 24.5% in 2008 and 24.7% in 2007.

More than 33% of glass containers were recycled while just more than 12% of plastic containers were recycled, according to the report. Plastic bottles were the most recycled plastic prod-

ucts, with HDPE estimated at 28% and PET at 21%.

Auto batteries led the way with 96.2% of them being recycled. A total of 71.6% of newsprint, or 7 million tons, was recycled in 2010, the report said.

While there was an increase in tonnage generation by Americans, the U.S. is still producing less waste than it did in 2005, when 252.7 million tons were

generated.

The report said there are about 9,000 curbside recycling programs in the country, up from 8,875 in 2002, and there are 3,095 community composting programs, down from 3,227 in 2002. ■

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