

Land values drop near waste disposal sites

ITHACA, N.Y. — If a waste disposal site is located near private property, the value of that property is lowered, even if the disposal site does not contain hazardous materials.

That's a finding from a recent study conducted by Brian Baker, a researcher in the department of agricultural economics at Cornell University. Baker studied landfill areas in three New York State counties - Tompkins, Saratoga, and Niagara - to determine their effect on surrounding property values.

Baker says that of all the economic problems besetting communities with waste disposal facilities, one of the most sensitive and controversial is that of real property values. "State and local government officials must weigh all factors when making decisions regarding landfill sites, real property values, and potential compensation claims."

More study needed

Baker adds that because concern

for the problems of hazardous waste disposal is relatively new in our society, more research and studies must be done to understand the economic implications of where landfills and waste disposal sites are located. Property tax structures, siting selections, and compensation procedures for lowered property values are some of the issues communities must grapple with in the near future.

"The regulatory and statutory frameworks for dealing with hazardous waste disposal sites are not in place yet," Baker says. "The next few years will be crucial for policy making."

In Niagara County, Baker studied property values near SCA Chemical Waste Services in the Town of Porter. This facility includes a secure landfill for chemical wastes, resource recovery, and reprocessing operations, liquid processing and treatment facilities, and sludge disposal. The SCA site contains hazardous wastes such as heavy

metal sludges, contaminated chemical wastes, and polychlorinated biphenols (PCB) solid waste.

"Realtors in the area were reluctant to speak at length about the effect that SCA might have on real estate values," he says. "Yet, properties immediately surrounding the site were described as below-average in demand." Homes in subdivisions two to five miles away from the area were average or above-average in demand.

Love Canal

Interestingly, he notes, property value reductions near the SCA site were smaller, rather than greater, after all the negative publicity in 1978 about Love Canal. Values already may have been reduced to market demand before the publicity, Baker says.

In general, however, the publicity about Love Canal did lower property values near landfills. Properties near the other sites studied - West Dryden in

Tompkins County and Waterford in Saratoga County - also experienced a reduction in values.

Waterford, which has a disposal site for by-products of manufacturing, such as benzene, toluene, chlorobenzene, and xylene, some of which are hazardous, is experiencing well-water contamination from this landfill. Property values near this site indicate a definite downward trend since 1978.

Tompkins County's landfill contains no hazardous wastes, however, it also affects property values around it.

Compensation

Baker says the relationship between waste disposal sites and property values must be examined and taken into account, but nearness to landfills is just one of many factors affecting the sale price and value of any piece of property.

Baker deals with the question of compensation for property value losses: "As long as damage to

health does not occur, there is little basis for compensating homeowners living near a landfill or hazardous waste disposal facility."

Baker points out that the homeowners probably paid below-average prices for their property and, in that way, may have been compensated already for lower property values.

If people bought property before the disposal site was built, however, they probably paid the full market price. These homeowners, says Baker, may be justified in expecting compensation for the devaluation of their property. At present, legislation to compensate property owners in this situation does not exist.

Baker concludes that if the site presents a health hazard, even a relatively inexpensive home may not compensate for the dangers of living in that home.

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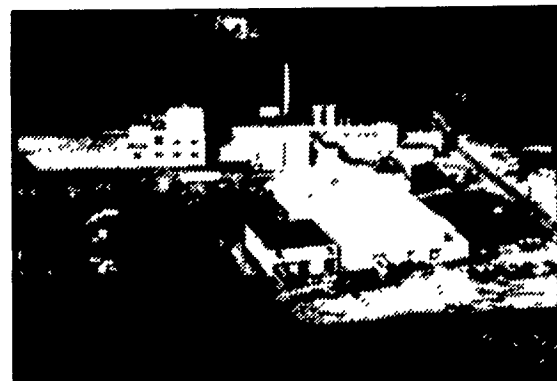
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Month of horse & cow

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Horse Art Exhibit, titled, "Celebration of the Horse," Hunterdon Art Center. Reception on June 24, 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. Exhibit continues to July 29.

Dairy Farm Open House

The big local promotion for June Dairy Month is the annual dairy farm open house held on Father's Day, Sunday, June 17. This year it will be hosted by Walter Dobozyński and family on their Readington Township farm on Rt. 523, a few miles north of Flemington.

This event draws as many as 1,500 to 2,000 people during open house hours, 1 to 5 p.m. There will be all kinds of demonstrations, tractor-drawn, guided wagon tours, yes, even a horse-drawn wagon ride.

A large committee of the Hunterdon Board of Agriculture, under the leadership of Henry Kuehn, Raritan Township, will be on hand to greet the visitors and serve as guides.

It's a fun day, an enjoyable day! There will be milk, crackers and cheese served. And, Hunterdon's new dairy princess will be crowned during the afternoon by reigning princess, Sandy Rogers.



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