

# Trash Tales

**H**EALTH HAZARDS, DRUGS AND TERRORISTS, OH MY. Much like Dorothy fled the wicked witch, Michiganders are running from Canada's trash. And to justify their actions, they are resorting to scare tactics.

Most recently, the state's Congressional delegation invoked terrorism as a reason to limit Canadian trash imports. It sounds crazy, but their efforts in tying the Great White North's solid waste to al Qaeda appear to have been successful because the House Committee on Energy and Commerce approved a bill that would allow Michigan and other states to restrict the amount of trash being imported to their landfills from Canada.

While the measure still needs approval by the full House and the Senate, Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., believes the bill is necessary because the state's landfills are running out of space and waste imports create health, environmental and even security risks. Rogers believes his state is under attack by a growing influx of Canadian waste that is creating a "U.S. border security weakness."

"Canadian trash trucks have been used to transport hazardous waste, medical waste and illegal drugs to the United States," he said, indicating terrorists also could use trash trucks to smuggle items into America.

Yet as those of us in the solid waste industry know, you shouldn't believe in fairy tales. No matter what side of the border it is generated on, trash is trash. The waste industry knows Canadian trash is not substantially different or more dangerous than U.S. garbage. It's mind-boggling that it hasn't been able to convince policymakers of that truth.

So perhaps waste companies should spin a story of their own — one that is grounded in facts. Industry representatives have been trying to educate Congress about trash whenever conflicts arise. For example, when Michigan began its war on trash, the industry tried to educate legislators about how trash is commerce that should not be regulated by states. Waste representatives continue to argue that efforts to reduce Canadian trash imports could create a trade war because American companies send hazardous waste to Canada. All of these reactive efforts are helpful, but it's time to get proactive too.

The waste industry needs to aggressively educate others about trash's path to the landfill before a conflict begins brewing. Companies could invite local congressmen and women to their waste facilities to earn support. They invite school children, why not politicians too? After all, it's easier to hear a message when not everyone is speaking at the same time.

Of course, proactive efforts to educate the public will not entirely eliminate trash's negative connotation. However, as Dorothy and her friends found out when they met the supposedly imposing Wizard, one's reputation can benefit greatly from the use of a loudspeaker.

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