The garbage barge that captured headlines throughout the spring and summer of 1987 was small compared to another load of toxic trash afloat now on the high seas.

The barge "Morgo" carried 3100 tons of Islip, Long Island's garbage from March, 1987 to July, 1987, and was refused entry into five states and three foreign countries. But a cargo ship that left Philadelphia in September, 1986, is carrying 15,000 tons of toxic ash from the city's municipal garbage incinerators and is still--15 months later--wandering the high seas looking for a place to dump its dioxin-laced load. Outside Philadelphia the press has ignored this much larger, more dangerous cargo searching for a home.

Three weeks ago, in HWN #52, we reviewed Philadelphia's attempt to export 250,000 tons of its incinerator ash to Panama in Central America. What we did not report was Philadelphia's earlier, and still ongoing, attempt to export its toxic ash to the Bahamas.

In summer, 1986, Philadelphia's mayor, Wilson Goode, made a deal with a local paving contractor, Paolino and Sons, to get rid of 15,000 tons of ash. Paolino and Sons, in turn, contracted with a company called Amalgamated Shipping, with headquarters in Freeport, Bahamas. The ship "Khian Sea," carrying 15,000 tons of toxic ash in its cargo hold, departed Philadelphia Sept. 5 headed for a Bahamian island 60 miles from Miami. But someone tipped the Bahamian government and when the Khian Sea arrived, Bahamian officials turned it away. Since that time the Khian Sea has sought a dumping ground for its cargo, but, according to the Associated Press, the Dominican Republic has said no, Honduras has said no, and the West African nation of Guinea-Bissau has said no.

The Khian Sea last left port November 4 from Panama in Central America where it had stopped for a crew change only--there had never been any hope the Panamanian government would accept the toxic ash. According to Russell Cook of the Philadelphia INQUIRER, the Khian Sea left port without any stated destination. He speculates that the ship is anchored in deep water somewhere in the Caribbean, trying to figure out what to do with its cargo that no one wants. Paolino and Sons cannot get paid by the city of Philadelphia until they can certify that the toxic ash was disposed of in an environmentally sound manner. Amalgamated cannot get paid until the Paolinos get paid. The Paolinos have filed a lawsuit in federal court in Philadelphia seeking $500,000 from Amalgamated, charging that Amalgamated originally misrepresented the willingness of the Bahamian government to accept Philadelphia's toasted trash.

What is most remarkable about this modern sea tale is that hundreds of other American communities have launched themselves on the same course as Philadelphia, preparing to create enormous quantities of dangerous incinerator ash faced with dioxin, lead, cadmium and other toxic compounds--with no safe place to put it.

--Peter Montague

NEW REPORT OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO AMERICA'S RECENT GARBAGE CRISIS

Until now, there has been no completely satisfactory book for trash warriors-participants in the trash wars of the '70s and '80s. Now one exists. It is presently available as a report from the University of California at Los Angeles, but the University of Arizona Press will issue it (revised) as a commercial book. We can't wait. Everyone who cares deeply about garbage will want to read this report. It has everything--heroes and villains, a complex plot, lots of factual information you can use in your own local struggle, and--most importantly--a coherent view of the trash crisis. The report is called The Dilemma of Solid Waste Management, subtitled The Rise of Incineration, Its Health and Air Impacts, The Lancer Project, and the Feasibility of Alternatives.

The immediate focus of this report is the 1600 ton-per-day mass burn garbage incinerator first proposed for Los Angeles in 1984. The project was known as the Los Angeles City Energy Recovery Project (or Lancer for short). Lancer was born as a gleam in investors' eyes in the late '70s and it died an anguished death in June, 1987, when L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley announced he was killing it though the city had already poured $12 million into it. All of California's trash-to-steam dreams faded, probably permanently, when Lancer died.

This 425-page report chronicles the life of the Lancer project (perhaps coincidentally, Lancer died about 2 weeks after this report appeared), but it is much more than the history of one project. It puts the Lancer project into historical perspective, looking back at the nation's first enthusiasm for mass burn incineration in the period from 1890 to 1910 (it was an unqualified failure), then analyzing the political events surrounding Lancer (proponents of the project rewarding friendly politicians with big campaign contributions, but those politicians losing elections anyway), the economics of the project (including the hidden government subsidies that proponents of the project always forgot to mention), the environmental impacts of the project (bad air and toxic ash), and the social effects of the proposal on the people of south-central Los Angeles (it led low-income minority groups into a coalition with white activist environmentalists, an alliance that has outlived Lancer.)

The report is VERY readable, even ENJOYABLE in its clarity. And every trash warrior in the U.S. will find something valuable in it for use in a local fight. READ THIS REPORT CAREFULLY TO LEARN HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN ARGUMENTS LOCALLY. The report is filled with the kinds of details you can't find anywhere else--like the quantities of cash that E.F. Hutton and Smith Barney pocketed just for arranging financing for the Lancer project. The report analyzes the economics of the project in devastating detail, beginning with the city's 1986 estimate that Lancer will handle trash at a cost to taxpayers of only $27.45 per ton. With meticulous detective work, the authors examine every assumption underlying this optimistic estimate, finally revealing that the true cost of Lancer would be AT LEAST $105.38 per ton.

We salute Robert Gottlieb and Beverley Pitman, project supervisors, and their team of 10 graduate students in the UCLA Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, who produced this exemplary study. THIS REPORT ILLUSTRATES WHAT URBAN PLANNING IS SUPPOSED TO BE ABOUT--helping cities avoid unpleasant surprises. Impressive work. For a copy send $25 (payable to the University of California) to Mr. Gottlieb at the UCLA Graduate School of Urban Planning, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024. Phone (213) 825-3791.

--Peter Montague

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