War Declared on Construction Waste

The effort to employ sustainable development techniques in the construction industry is getting a not-so-subtle nudge from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP). As of July 1, 2006, the agency has begun enforcing a selective statewide ban on the disposal of asphalt, brick, concrete, metal, and wood. Some counties and cities in the U.S. have banned these materials already. The Massachusetts restriction is the first statewide ban. Loads under 5 cubic yards or with less than 20% of the banned materials are exempt from the rule. The ban is part of a state goal to reduce non-municipal solid waste by 88% by 2010. Reportedly, the MDEP will not ban materials for which there is not a substantial market for the recycled material.

Massachusetts has about 20 landfills today. In the early 1990s, there were approximately 130. The state has 10 construction and demolition waste processing facilities today, with another four coming on line soon. This will provide a total of 3.5 million tons of waste processing capacity.

On July 1, a law took effect in San Francisco that requires the recycling of construction materials. The Construction and Demolition Debris Recovery Ordinance requires contractors to send waste to a certified facility instead of a landfill.

According to SF Environment, the city's environmental agency, approximately 100,000 tons of construction waste are sent to landfills annually from projects in the city. The agency estimates that 65 to 70% of this material is recyclable.

Private firms are scrambling to establish facilities throughout the area to receive construction waste.

These are two examples of regulations that will become the standard across the country in the coming years with increasing concern over landfill operations. It would be prudent for local contracting groups to look at local conditions and prepare to deal with the recycling of construction waste.

Here Comes the Sun

The world's largest solar-powered, sustainable community is under construction in Hawaii. The U.S. Army is renovating 2500 existing military housing units and building over 5000 new units using the guidelines of the Army's SPiRiT (Sustainable Project Rating Tool) program. In addition to the solar power, the Oahu project will recycle about 65% of construction and demolition debris into infrastructure and foundations. When completed, the project will get about 30% of its electrical needs from a photovoltaic film placed on garage roofs.