



The Garbage Project

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Mr. Richard Carrión
Chairman of the Board, President & CEO
BANCO POPULAR
P.O. Box 362708
San Juan, PR 00936-2708

Dear Richard:

I recently became aware of an effort by Energy Answers Corporation (Mr. Pat Mahoney) and Sr. Federico Sánchez to develop a comprehensive solution for Puerto Rico's solid waste problem by utilizing the resource recovery approach pioneered at the SEMASS facility in Massachusetts.

Looking back at the opportunity I had to address your "garbage" forum last year, I take some pride in believing that I may have had some role in stimulating Sr. Sánchez to introduce today's most appropriate technology and solid waste management strategy to Puerto Rico.

In your beautiful island environment, this resource recovery approach is, without a doubt, the most user-friendly solution. Utilizing the wastes generated by society as a source of raw materials and fuel for clean energy generation makes infinite sense. The SEMASS strategy, when fully implemented in Puerto Rico, will certainly contribute to the island's goals for sustainable economic development, self-sufficiency, and improved environmental conditions.

In my role as consultant to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., I was asked to identify an appropriate high-technology solution and to write, produce, and narrate a video which has now been included as the "Garbage Dilemma" portion of a permanent exhibit ("Science in American Life") in the National Museum of American History. SEMASS, or "The Cape Cod Solution," as it is becoming known, was my choice because it was the only facility with which I was familiar (and I am familiar with dozens) which places as much emphasis on efficient materials recovery and residue reduction as on energy production. That is the same reason that SEMASS received the most detailed description – a whole chapter – of any solid waste management option in my book *Rubbish! The Archeology of Garbage*.

The philosophy of Energy Answers is total recovery, and a statement made by Pat Mahoney seems especially significant to me: "The environmental yardstick for measuring success in solid waste management should be how little we discard at the end of the process." By implementing The Cape Cod Solution, a "zero disposal" goal is not out of the realm of possibility. SEMASS is already to a 5 - 10 percent rate of residue, with some real possibilities of utilizing most of that material as well.

BANCO POPULAR's exhibit, "The Disposable Island: The Garbage Problem in Puerto Rico," and the series of lectures you sponsored certainly highlighted the problem, and I am pleased that you included me as part of the program. I am sure that your goal was to simulate a sense of responsibility among your island's residents and to provide some positive incentive to develop suitable solutions.

I believe that SEMASS is your best solution. I can't think of a better way for Puerto Rico to leap from a "clean-up and catch-up" position to one whose state-of-the-art, cutting edge character would be recognized around the world.

The responsible environmental community believes that "SEMASS has demonstrated that environmentally sound solid waste disposal can be accomplished on large geographic scales, and in the real world of business economics. The world of SEMASS illustrates how to interweave ecological issues, politics, government, transport systems and other issues to achieve good solutions to a major societal problem" – Ecological Society of America.

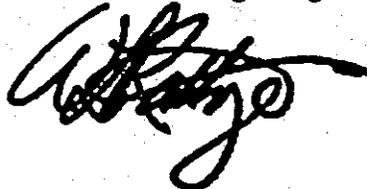
At a scale of 3000 tons of trash per day, a solution like SEMASS would make a major contribution toward addressing the island's total waste generation of 8000 tons per day. A resource recovery approach would certainly be compatible with, and a tremendous addition to, more traditional waste reduction and recycling programs. Note that although various recycling and other waste management programs are often seen as the ultimate in a waste strategy, they do not approach the "zero disposal" goal which should be the primary objective on an island – and everywhere else for that matter.

The Cape Cod Solution, in my mind, should be a cornerstone for a sustainable development policy. Corresponding educational programs would emphasize respect for resources and encourage residents to reduce litter and stop indiscriminate dumping on the island. It is difficult to effectively teach children not to litter when their government advocates a landfill approach which raises widely visible mounds of garbage on the top of marshlands in San Juan.

I have studied solid waste management options for more than twenty-five years and understand the magnitude of the decisions your island is facing. I firmly believe your solution should include a resource recovery facility at its core. The environmental and economic benefits you will realize are significant and will provide a basis for future growth and prosperity in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico deserves no less than the best possible approach to the waste management problem and I am pleased to hear the direction you are headed. If there is anything I can do to assist in bringing a responsible a responsible garbage solution to Puerto Rico, I am available.

Yours forever in garbage research,



William L. Raithje, Ph.D.
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