

Former commission chairman frustrated by task of finding waste site

By Jackie Hershkowitz
Staff Writer

We don't want poison in our towns. ... We don't want to die! We don't want dirty air. ... Don't poison our animals. Don't poison our people. Don't make trees die. Please STOP making hazardous waste.

Sincerely, Ms. Moeller's kindergarten, Troutman Elementary School

Thousands of similar letters were sent to Alvis Turner in 1990 and 1991. Schoolchildren and other angry citizens from across the state wrote the UNC professor, pleading for their counties to be spared from becoming hazardous-waste dumping grounds.

The 62-year-old professor of environmental science quickly became accustomed to public criticism. As chairman of the N.C. Commission on Hazardous Waste Management, the body

chosen to select a site for a hazardous waste facility, Turner was an easy target for angry citizens.

"I am a true environmentalist," Turner said. "What hurt most is that the public thought I would do anything to hurt any community or citizen."

"On an average day, I got 100 to 150 letters. There was a time when I was getting so much mail, the post office had to send it on a special truck."

Lonnie Sharpe, an assistant dean of the School of Engineering at N.C. Agricultural & Technical State University who served on the commission with Turner, said that although the public had the right to be concerned, some of their fears were unjustified.

"There are some things which we just knew would not occur," Sharpe said.

"A lot of people had no problem with a facility being built, as long as it wasn't

in their back yard," Sharpe said. "But if you didn't want it, you shouldn't have wanted it in anyone else's back yard, either."

Turner added: "People didn't even give us a chance to explain the benefits of having a hazardous waste facility in their county. I'm sure some fears could have been eliminated if they had just listened."

Would you please put the hazardous waste incinerator somewhere else? I live 112 mile from the waste site and have a big garden in my back yard, and the gases will harm my crops. So if you think this is so good, why don't you put it in your own back yard, cause I don't want it in mine.

Sincerely, Shawn Menscel, Coral Spring School

Hostile citizens confronted the commission as it toured the state, searching for a suitable site and holding meetings with community groups. Once, the commission was pelted with trash. On another occasion, citizens formed a human barricade in front of the property being considered for a waste facility.

"This is about responsibility," Turner said. "For 10 years, North Carolina has



Alvis Turner

been sending its waste to neighboring states. We've been dumping on them long enough."

In 1990, North Carolina entered an agreement to build a landfill, incinerator and water treatment facility that would be operational by December 1991. That year, N.C. industries sent a staggering

182 million pounds of hazardous waste to other states.

"From the beginning, our chances of finding a site were slim to none," Turner said. "Every time we turned around, we were slapped with a lawsuit."

Twenty-six lawsuits were filed against the commission. Private citizens, community groups and environmental agencies sued the Hazardous Waste Commission.

After months of litigation, an ideal site was found in Lee County, Turner said. But due to a misunderstanding of state laws, the General Assembly did not approve the site.

"I was frustrated with the public, but I could understand their fears and emotions," Turner said. "But what frustrated me even more was that the General Assembly, which is supposed to do what is best for the state, refused to approve our recommendation."

In addition to public criticism and governmental red tape, Turner cited the media as an antagonistic factor.

"The media only focused on the spectacular — large crowds and outbursts," he said. "The scientific and technical aspects were never explained."

Turner resigned from his position as chairman of the commission in May. The search for a site is now in the hands of private companies who contract with the state, Turner said.

If asked again to serve on a commission to find a waste site, how would he respond?

"Not in a million years," he said. "I tried it once and was unsuccessful. Let someone else try."

Campus Calendar

FRIDAY
10 a.m. UNC Accounting Students will give free tax help until 2 p.m. in Carr Mill Mall.
Noon: Orientation interest session, 211-212 Union for students interested in being junior-transfer orientation counselors.
UNC Learning Skills Center to offer study skills and time management workshop, 104 Phillips Annex.
1 p.m. Juggling Club, Carmichael Ballroom.
Students for Cancer Awareness, Research and Education to have arcade tournament in Union Underground. Call Susan Mulford, 932-3403, to sign up.
4 p.m. Black Cultural Center to give a reception for Thulsi Davis, poet and author of "1959."
6 p.m. Black Interdenominational Student Association will have worship service followed by a potluck dinner in the Wesley Foundation.
Hillel: Dinner, services. A congressman will speak about Israel on Capitol Hill and Jews in government.
8 p.m. Terence Blanchard Quintet, Memorial Hall.
9 p.m. Association of International Students will have an international mixer on the second floor of Carmichael Residence Hall.

SATURDAY
10 a.m. Rape Action Project will have a training session until 2 p.m. in 208 Union.
UNC Accounting Students will give free tax help until 2 p.m. in Carr Mill Mall.
2 p.m. Carolina Fever will meet in Upendo Lounge to distribute N.C. State tickets. Members must wear 1991-92 T-shirts.
8 p.m. UNC Jazz Band with Rick Lillard and Tim Eyerman in Memorial Hall.

SUNDAY
Noon: La Casa Espanola los invita "Sobremesa" en Lenoir para desayuno.
5 p.m. French House will show "Sugar Cane Alley" in the second-floor lounge of Carmichael.
ITEMS OF INTEREST
Registrar's Office will be closed Monday and Tuesday, will resume operation in Hanes basement.

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REWARDING EXCELLENCE

STUDENTS' UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING '92 AWARDS

The Students' Undergraduate Teaching Awards Selection Committee would like to congratulate the following teachers on being nominated for an award. Each of these professors and teaching assistants has demonstrated excellence in the teaching of undergraduates on this campus and every one is considered a winner. From this group, three professors and five teaching assistants will be chosen to receive an award. Finalists will be announced the week of March 9.

We would also like to thank all the students who nominated these outstanding teachers.

Andrew Scott	Geoff Sayre-McCord	Patrick O'Neil	Keith Simmons
Kim Russell	Steve Shallit	Richard Kohn	Paul Ferguson
Rob Michaels	Mercedes Guijaro-Crouch	Jean Desair	Loren Smith
Paul Fiddleman	Jane Hawkins	Jane Hawkins	Harry Watson
Peter Coclanis	Jack Roper	Alfred Guender	Robert McMahon
Charles Capper	Earl Spurgin	Marsha Collins	Donald Oehler
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Annalee Cato	Gary Pielak	Robert Daniels	James Hile
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