

Southern Iowa

Styrofoam saves school district money

By JUDY KRIEGER
Courier staff writer

OTTUMWA — Using Styrofoam lunch trays has helped save the Ottumwa school district money.

The throw-away trays save dishwashing costs. That plus cutting back on food service workers has resulted in cost savings to the district.

"The trays are being used to reduce expenditures," personnel director Jess Terrell told board members Monday night. And in some cases the measure has been successful.

An estimated savings of \$33,562 is being realized, food services director Yvonne Johnson

School board: Board avoids staff cuts

Continued from Page 1

items are being held at 1998-99 levels.

The additional expenditures include: GED allocation, up \$30,000; open enrollment tuition, \$75,294; student transportation, \$17,000; athletic transportation, \$23,000; additional custodian at OHS, \$33,000; area education agency allocation, \$36,947.

Scalzo said that "every effort" said.

The savings come from replacing three full-time food service employees at the high school with two part-time workers. The three workers retired. All had received

has been made not to dismantle the quality programs" provided for students. "We've tried not to cut more staff," he said. "We prefer to do it some other way."

Board member Steve Menke said that "whatever touches kids the most should be cut the least." He said he would be more in favor of making administration cuts rather than the planned cuts of the high school position and extra curricular assignments.

benefits and the three put in 23 hours a day total.

The two part-time workers put in nine-and-one-half hours a day, total, and receive no benefits. And Styrofoam trays are being used at

a cost of \$53.25 per day for the 1,065 trays used.

Terrell said that lunch trays are used at the board office preschool, Lincoln, James and Eisenhower elementary schools, some at Evans Middle School and the Alternative High School.

There has been concern, he said, that the Styrofoam is not environmentally friendly. School officials share that concern and have been investigating recycling methods.

Johnson said she had been working with some disposable companies that would recycle the Styrofoam for a fee. She also is checking with other Ottumwa businesses that have Styrofoam use, such as Excel, to share recycling expenses.

School board to address Styrofoam issue

By JUDY KRIEGER
Courier staff writer

OTTUMWA — The issue of school use of Styrofoam will be addressed at Monday night's school board meeting.

The board will meet at 7 p.m. at the board office, 422 McCarroll Drive.

The issue was brought up recently when County Supervisor Steve Siegel asked the Solid Waste Commission to approve a resolution urging the school district to stop using Styrofoam trays to serve some lunches.

Siegel did not contact the district about the trays, personnel director Jess Terrell told the board's personnel committee last month.



Terrell also said that district officials were checking companies that may recycle Styrofoam.

Also Monday, the board will be asked approval to retain the Bell Law Firm of Mount Pleasant

and the Siegel, Brill, Greupner, Duffy and Foster Law Firm of Minneapolis, Minn., to represent the district as a plaintiff against Wellmark Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Iowa.

The school district will be joining other companies and organiza-

tions seeking to recover overcharges levied against self-funded health plans for 1991 to 1995.

A number of agencies, counties and districts have initiated class action suits or other litigation to try and recover some of the overcharges, Superintendent Joe Scalzo said.

"The potential is there of a significant recovery of funds," he said. "At least two lawsuits have prevailed and settled."

There is "really no cost" to the district, Scalzo said, "unless we recover some of the charges — the law firms involved would get part of that." If no charges are recovered, no fees would be paid to the law firms.

Also Monday, the board:

- Will be asked to approve the \$27,947 bid submitted by Com-

munication Innovators for installation of cabling at Eisenhower, Douma and Pickwick elementary schools and the Smith Warren building; and the \$55,113 bid by J.S. Turner Sound Co. for installation of telephone equipment for Agassiz, Douma, Eisenhower, Pickwick and Smith-Warren.

- Will hear about textbook needs for next year.

- Will hear about changes in the Evans Middle School guidance program.

- Will be asked to approve student trips, Evans Challengers team students' field trip to Camp Dodge June 3 and 4; OHS JROTC Drill Team to a St. Louis, Mo., drill competition April 23-25; and Evans Middle School Student Council to the Coral Ridge Mall at Coralville May 14.

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School budget: Salaries questioned

Continued from Page 1

He makes about \$73,000, and has not yet received a raise this year.

Five of the seven Davis County administrators have received raises, the largest about 4 percent. Teachers are aiming for about a 5 percent raise and the administration position was that teachers should receive a 3 percent raise.

Davis County schools spend a comparatively high amount on busing. The schools own the buses, rather than leasing. However, the buses must cover the second highest number of miles among the state's districts, topped only by western Dubuque. Davis County is the only school district in the state that spans an entire county.

A bus driver at the meeting pointed out that her route had grown from 47 miles to 57 miles in the past year. She picks up her first child at 6:50 a.m.

Goetsche has been superintendent for 10 years. That is the second longest tenure of any superintendent in Area 15. He said he felt it was a difficult vote for the board. The only options seem to be raising revenue somehow or beginning to deficit spend.

Prevo noted that the one who makes the most money always "takes a few shots."

"It's easy to come under fire," Goetsche said. "It's not unusual to have them point the finger at the top. That's kind of where the buck stops."

Several at the meeting said that cuts should be to administration before teachers. One compared Goetsche's salary to that of Joe Scalzo, Ottumwa's superintendent. He said that, at Scalzo's rate figured on a per student basis, Goetsche would only make \$35,000.

Lunch-tray disposal concerns supervisor

Styrofoam takes up space in landfill

By JOEL HANNAHS
Courier staff writer

p. 3-24-99

OTTUMWA — A Wapello County supervisor is urging the Ottumwa school district to quit using Styrofoam lunch trays.

Supervisor Steve Siegel has proposed a resolution for the Solid Waste Commission that — though it would stop short of banning the trays from the landfill — would "urge the Ottumwa Community School District to reconsider the decision."

The resolution is on the agenda for today's 4 p.m. meeting at City Hall.

"I want to see if anyone else out there cares," Siegel said.

If no one else is interested, he will not be adamant about the proposal, he said. His resolution cites two reasons: an increase in the volume of trash that shortens the lifespan of the landfill, and "a confusing message to the students."

The district has switched to disposable trays at five schools.

"Styrofoam lasts forever — it doesn't decompose," Siegel said.

He said his concerns are environmental and his move does not stem from the staffing and budget issues in the Ottumwa schools, where he is a union representative for school employees.

"I've just been hearing a lot of complaints from people," Siegel said. "I know my own kids go to Lincoln. I've been up there and observed that the trash volume has greatly increased."

Siegel raised the discussion at the

most recent meeting of the commission. Jody Gates, solid waste commissioner, then discussed the subject with Yvonne Johnson, the school's food service director, before writing a memo to city administrator Bob Keefe.

"It does not appear that the use of Styrofoam trays is a significant problem for our solid waste operations and, at this time, we are not proposing to take any action," Keefe wrote in a letter to the commission members dated March 19.

Siegel placed the resolution on the amended agenda since that time. Keefe had said on Monday that the resolution would probably not be discussed at today's meeting because the agenda had already been distributed, but it was amended at Siegel's request.

The memo from Gates cites a conversation with Johnson. The change to Styrofoam was prompted by the district's need to reduce costs — including labor costs. Plastic trays need washing.

According to Johnson, the school's disposal costs have not risen throughout the year.

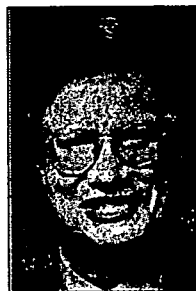
"It's difficult to ask the schools not to use Styrofoam when there's no ban on this material going to the landfill," Gates said in her memo to Keefe. "Additionally, since Styrofoam doesn't add a great deal of weight measured in tonnage, there isn't much of an impact on the planning area's attempt to meet our waste reduction goals."

Gates noted that private companies are switching to paper, but can pass the cost increase on to customers — an option that the schools do not have.

Jane Mild, director of the Ottumwa/Wapello Recycling Center, also responded to Gates through a memo. She said she had a discussion

Styrofoam

Please turn to Page 3



Steve Siegel

Styrofoam flap creates saucy debate at

Supervisor urges resolution be passed to eliminate use of trays by the Ottumwa

By JOEL HANNAH
Courier staff writer

OTTUMWA — The Solid Waste Commission meeting was the scene of lively debate at City Hall Wednesday.

Discord centered on the use of Styrofoam lunch trays in the Ottumwa School District.

Supervisor Steve Siegel proposed a resolution urging the district to quit using the trays. Heated discussion was sparked, ending when

Siegel made a motion to table it for one month.

Even that failed to get unanimous support. City council members Larry Roush and Ken Williams voted against it. The commissioners are the Wapello County supervisors and the Ottumwa City Council members.

Support was expressed by Supervisors Jerry Parker and Rhea Huddleston and Council member Frank Flanders. Stopping short of voicing opposition, Council members Frank Fisher and Darlene Peta challenged

Siegel's assertions.

Solid Waste Commissioner Jody Gates began by pointing out a new option. Responding to Siegel's inquiry, the department has located a company — Dart Containers — that recycles light foam, such as cups and trays. Cost is unknown.

Siegel said he has seen the volume of trash at schools increase five-fold, and that he has heard a steady stream of criticism. While schools teach kids to recycle, a mixed message is sent. Kids see issues in black and white, he said.

Questioning the environmental impact, Peta said Styrofoam does not decay. It takes up landfill space without polluting air or water. But chlorine and cleansers for plastic trays can add carcinogens to the water supply. She also said the resolution's tone does not increase goodwill.

Flanders disagreed. The message is positive, not hostile, he said. "I question the priority of this commission to single out four or five schools in this district in the name of environmentalism,"

Williams said.

Styrofoam is widely used in the community, he said, and the commission should not be "passing the buck" to individual businesses.

"Passing legislation?" Flanders questioned.

"That's what a resolution is," Williams responded.

That exchange was followed by another between Parker and Williams. Both tried to speak, but Parker said Williams had a point.

Styrofoam: Recycling school's waste a possibility

Continued from Page 1

Economics should not be allowed to drive environmental issues, Parker responded. All environmental precautions cost money, he said, but many are still important.

"In time, (this) effects the landfill," he said. "That's the area we control."

Mayor Dale Uehling interjected a reminder — a recycling option is possible.

Eisenhower Elementary teacher Gail Granneman said that trash at school lunches has increased from 1-2 bags to 4-6 bags. A letter has been written to the administration about the issue, she said, and noted an inconsistent message to

students.

"We feel we have really tried to instruct our students in recycling," she said.

Williams said the resolution is too limited in scope and singles out the school district.

"Let's not fool ourselves that we have really addressed the big issue of Styrofoam," he said. "I don't

believe that for a minute."

Huddleston said that the importance is the message to government entities. Siegel defended the focus on schools because that was a recently made decision increasing the use. Calling his resolution "toothless," he said the side benefit will be to spark community discussion.

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"That's what a resolution is," Williams responded.

That exchange was followed by another between Parker and Williams. Both tried to speak, and Parker said Williams had already spoken.

Parker said thinking it is improper to make a recommendation to another government entity is a mistake.

"Is it a directive? Is it an order?" Parker said. "No, we're not saying that. Read that."

However, Roush agreed with Williams that the decision is the school board's, and noted the landfill coordinator's statement that foam is not a problem. Fisher questioned the timing, as the school district has a budget crunch.

Styrofoam

Please turn to Page 3

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Continued from Page 1.

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Styrofoam resolution fails to get support

School district's use of lunch trays made from material led to proposal

By JOEL HANNAHS
Courier staff writer

OTTUMWA — A proposal opposing the use of Styrofoam in Ottumwa's schools failed to garner enough support Wednesday.

The action would have been largely symbolic because the Solid Waste Commission does not have authority over school board decisions. But the vote is illustrative of a longstanding county/city relationship.

The resolution was proposed to the Solid Waste Commission by County Supervisor Steve Siegel and would have urged the Ottumwa School District to quit using Styrofoam lunch trays. City council members voted it down.

The vote was 4-4. The commission is made up of the Wapello County Supervisors and the Ottumwa City Council. For an

Ottumwa

action to pass, a majority of both groups is needed.

The motion was supported by all three supervisors: Rhea Huddleston, Jerry Parker and Siegel. They were joined by Council member Frank Flanders. Though the majority of city issues receive unanimous votes, it is not uncommon for Flanders to vote against the majority. Flanders was appointed to the council last year.

The rest of the council — Frank Fisher, Darlene Peta, Larry Roush and Ken Williams — opposed Siegel's resolution.

Siegel withdrew the resolution he presented in the March meeting and submitted a new one that added an encouragement toward recycling should discontinuing the use of Styrofoam not prove practical.

Arguments for and against Siegel's proposal remained along lines outlined in last month's debate.

"I don't think we ought to be telling the school board what to do," Fisher said.

Roush said the resolution's scope seemed too exclusively directed at the schools. Fisher said that if there is a real problem, there should be a real solution.

"This (resolution) is not going to do anything," he said.

Peta said Styrofoam is a minor

environmental impact of waste in the landfill.

"I'm far, far from convinced that Styrofoam is an innocuous substance," Flanders said.

Huddleston said the schools are different than other businesses, because they make a point of teaching children of the importance of recycling. And Siegel pointed out that even the discussion of an issue is important, because interest in recycling has waned.

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Peta said Styrofoam is a minor part of a broader problem, and said the focus should be on heavier substances, such as corrugated cardboard. She called reducing Styrofoam a "moot point," when compared to alternatives such as reusable plastic trays.

"How the other products are produced has more effect on the environment than Styrofoam," she said.

She urged a look at the whole

recycling has waned.

Parker said that if the commission is reluctant to encourage such a small step, there is no chance of ever reducing landfill use enough to avoid a penalty fee.

The city is being charged 50 cents per ton that is dumped at the landfill, because the reduction rate is not being achieved. That will total about \$15,000 in a year. City administrator Bob Keefe noted that the landfill has an estimated "lifespan" of 200 years.