

# Golfers benefit from city's composting program

*Residents excited by Cheyenne plan that saves money, reduces fertilizer use and improves turf*

By Vern Putney

The Cheyenne, Wyo., Parks & Recreation Department's composting program, for more than 20 years grinding along in comparative silence, suddenly has struck a strong chord of interest among city golfers, the general public and the State Department of Environmental Quality Solid Waste Management.

Cheyenne residents now are taking bags of leaves and grass to six pits designed to provide compost for grounds improvement at Prairie View and Airport golf courses.

The pits were opened up after the Laramie County Resource Council suggested the public contributions to help preserve the environment.

The idea has been a success all around. "It reduced the amount of pickup for the sanitation department. We can use the leaves. Everyone's a winner," said Dave Romero, Cheyenne Parks Department director. He added the program also saves \$13 a ton that would have to otherwise be paid for landfill fees, reduces use of fertilizers at the golf courses, "and gives us good turf development."

Romero explained: "Grass and leaves placed in the pit are left for six years, during which they break down into compost.

"The compost then is put through a grinder and sifted to make a top dressing for the grounds surrounding the golf courses. The top dressing is put on the courses' fairways and areas surrounding the trees."

Intrigued, state environmental officials visited a compost site last October and have received a detailed operations report from Romero.

Each fall and spring, Romero said, leaves and grass clippings collected from Cheyenne's city parks, golf courses and streets are dumped at the pits. About 60 tons of materials can fill one pit.

As leaves and grass clippings are dumped, equipment periodically pushes the organics forward to the end of the pit, creating more space within each pit and more compaction.

Romero said on the average, 17 to 20 half-ton truckloads are dumped each Saturday. Winter weather conditions have reduced this level substantially.

Approximately 50 to 60 tons are processed each year and used on the golf courses. Weather conditions are a factor. Dry conditions are necessary prior to



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grinding compost. No organics are included other than leaves and grass.

No negative conditions have been experienced in processing or stockpiling compost, Romero added.

"Moisture going into the pits has boosted the decomposition process. Leaves also are not being grinded before dumping into the pits. Therefore, wind conditions have not created debris blowing around the pits and has been very well contained in the pits."

Romero emphasized to the Department of Environmental Quality that the procedures and practices outlined have inexpensively disposed of leaves and grass clippings without using landfill sites and—

most important — not polluting the air.

Composting, he said, has improved the soil's physical properties and also improved grass root development. The compost has lightened clay and enhanced soil aggregation in sandy areas.

Other benefits include decreasing soil crusting and cracking; improving water infiltration and retention; and improving aeration.

Volunteers from the Resources Council man the pits, which are enclosed by a chainlink fence, to ensure plastic bags and other non-biodegradable things are not dumped.

The general public can also use the compost, if they like, Romero said.

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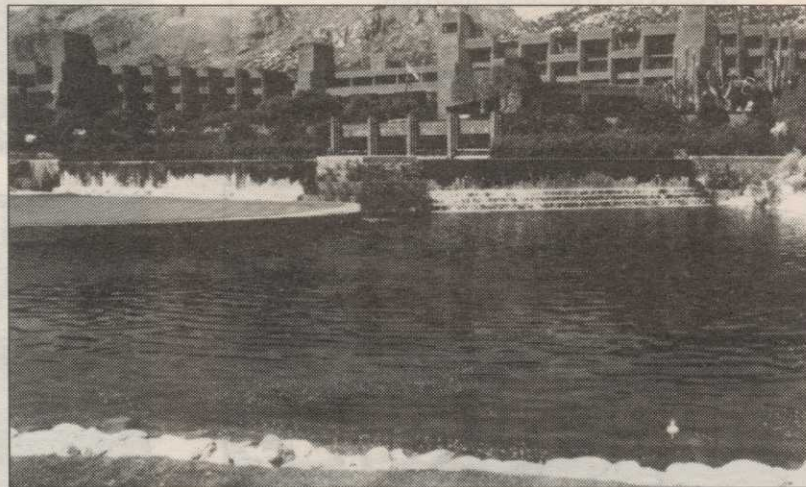
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