

# Is This Garbage Pickup Necessary?

**B**ECAUSE Oklahoma City voters turned down their appeal for another penny of sales tax, officials say that garbage pickups will be made once a week instead of twice, as at present.

They really know how to hit us where it will be felt. If they laid off 40 or 50 underworked employees inside a building who would notice it? But cutting down on garbage pickups in the heat of summer — that's politics of a different odor.

Since many citizens pile their garbage and grass clippings at curbside days ahead of pickups, the change also may have visible effects on "Oklahoma City Beautiful."

Maybe we ought to analyze our garbage and ask ourselves: "Is this garbage pickup really necessary?" TV frequently shows us individuals (apparently with atrophied sense of smell) who have found treasures in garbage dumps. They have turned what people throw away into houses, works of art (?), and other things they admire.

For the past 10 years the Univer-

sity of Arizona has conducted what it calls "The Garbage Project." It is headed by a garbologist named Bill Rathje. He says in an item in "Meat Board Reports" that a garbologist is an archaeologist who is trained to learn about ancient societies by looking at ancient garbage.

The Arizona Garbage Project operates by looking at modern garbage to learn about today's Americans. It has turned up some interesting but not necessarily surprising data.

For one thing, people over-report in statistical interviews how much meat their families consume. "People associate red meat with status," Rathje said, "and they tend to exaggerate red meat consumption. Whether it's conscious or unconscious, we can't say."

Much of our garbage consists of expensive packaging. In its cost studies the U.S. Department of Agriculture has determined that the potato chip bag, table syrup bottle, chewing gum wrapper and soft drink bottle may cost twice as much

as the products they contain.

Plastic bag manufacturers say it's only a matter of time until paper bags disappear from supermarkets because plastic bags cost less. Consumers probably won't care just so the bags are big enough to hold their garbage.

Current food consumption is estimated to be about 1,400 pounds per person per year, just about what it was 20 years ago. Experts predict it will be about the same 20 years from now, with other wastes offsetting possible reductions in table scraps due to increased eating away from home.

That promises a solid future for those who collect garbage as well as those who collect useable items from the dumps.

A number of cities have tried to salvage garbage on a large scale, hoping to convert it into energy, to recover metals, and may turn a profit. The success record is spotty because machinery and labor are costly and because most garbage is just useless trash.