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## Councilman collects garbage to make a point

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 The Post and Courier

(CORRECTION 7/30/99): Charleston City Councilman Wendell Gilliard was misidentified in a Post and Courier photo Thursday of city sanitation workers.

City Councilman Wendell Gilliard was talking trash Wednesday.

Not political trash, mind you, but oozy, stinky trash.

Hanging off the back of a city garbage truck, Gilliard worked briefly with a sanitation crew in the Shadowmoss subdivision as the high temperature downtown reached 95 degrees.

He challenged other council members to do it, too.

If they knew what it's like to work on a garbage truck during the summer, they'd be more sympathetic when they consider pay raises and better benefits for sanitation workers, Gilliard said.

Gilliard was hot, too, but not from the summer sun.

Charleston officials pulled carriage horses off the streets last week for the first time this year as downtown temperatures soared to 100 degrees, breaking a 22-year-old record.

The same concern also should go to all "front line" city employees who toil outside during the summer. "It is alright to care about horses," the councilman said. "But the workers should have the top priority."

So far this summer, the heat has not caused health problems among sanitation employees, said Samuel J. Price II, a sanitation superintendent. "We have instructed our people to work safe, and we have emphasized that they take breaks when necessary," Price said. "Their jobs are difficult primarily because they work outside, and they have to deal with the elements."

Gilliard dealt with the heat and odor of rotten garbage for 1 1/2 hours Wednesday as he and a three-man crew wound their way through Shadowmoss, emptying big green containers.

It took Gilliard a few minutes to get into the swing of things until collector Michael West gave him some advice. "It would be a lot better if you get that towel out of your hand," West told the councilman.

Gilliard had the towel to wipe his face. Soon, he had a blue sweat band around his head. "One thing I can tell you, it is hot," Gilliard said, after he had emptied his third garbage container. "You learn to appreciate these guys and the things they do."

When Gilliard was not talking about the plight of the workers, the crew talked about garbology and "the flow."

The garbage always stinks, but the stench in some areas is not as powerful, West said. In Shadowmoss, the garbage is less odorous because residents there tend to put it in plastic bags.

But in other neighborhoods - and West wouldn't say which ones - residents scrape food directly into the containers where it sits and rots. Bagged or unbagged, the garbage breeds maggots and roaches, and fire ants are tossed in with grass clippings.

"Look at the dust they breathe, the red ants on my arms and the flies and the smell," Gilliard said. "You got to be dedicated to do this."

Each day the crew empties 1,200 to 1,300 containers, said driver and foreman Charles Brown. Shadowmoss is their biggest route. When it's time to pull forward, West signals Brown with a high-pitched "heeee." When things are going well, West and collector Carl Grant are into "the flow," each picking up four to five containers a minute.

But "the flow," Gilliard said, sometimes is interrupted by motorists who don't yield to the garbage truck and the collectors and residents who dash out as they drive away to stop them for the "forget-me-not" garbage.

Each day, the crew collects 13,000 to 18,000 pounds of garbage and dumps it at the county incinerator in North Charleston. They work 10-hour days, four days a week.

Gilliard said the city should give monthly awards to the best sanitation crews.

"They have pride in what they do," Gilliard said. "That's why we should appreciate what they do."

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