

Businesses face mandatory recycling rule next year

CalChamber says regulation comes at wrong time

Ben Keller — STAFF WRITER

When California's Commercial Recycling mandate takes effect next year, businesses all over the state will have to throw less away as cities and counties develop programs to keep a considerable chunk of the solid waste stream out of local landfills.

The measure, administered by the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) requires that any business generating four cubic yards or more of trash per week subscribe to a recycling service or haul its recyclable waste to a recycling facility.

In addition, each county or city has until July 1, 2012 to implement its own commercial recycling program, which might include setting out blue bins and implementing outreach efforts that encourage not only recycling in the workplace, but proactive steps such as buying reusable materials.

About 11% of California businesses already operate in municipalities with some kind of commercial recycling program, including those in Fresno. According to Evan Edgar, principal civil engineer with

Sacramento-based environmental engineering firm Edgar & Associates, another 19% — around 250,000 businesses — will need similar services to comply with the measure.

Essentially, he said, it aims for the same kind of strategies that have been tried in Bay Area communities for years and follows an effort to catch up with the residential market where curbside pickup services have long been the norm.

"Basically the front-end loader business has been kind of underserved," said Edgar, who advocates for more than 100 haulers on legislative policy and permit writing. "It's like a low-hanging fruit that hasn't been picked yet."

As long overdue as it may be, Evans added that the measure is still a modest proposal, asking for another 1.5 millions tons of traditional recyclables by 2020 to avoid 5 million metric tons of greenhouse gases generated in the procurement of materials and manufacturing of new products.

At worst, new mandates to recycle will result in additional costs to businesses by an average of 5% over the next nine years,

Evans said, while a medium sized city could spend as little as \$33,000 in start-up costs for a program of their choosing.

On the business side, these costs constitute an additional burden at a time when unemployment is at near-record levels, according to the California Chamber of Commerce.

"Although the business community supports the shared goal of responsible waste management, discussion of new business mandates must be viewed through the lens of the economy, job creation and job retention," according to a CalChamber position paper.

According to CalRecycle, individual cities and counties will have the option to implement their own penalties for businesses out of compliance.

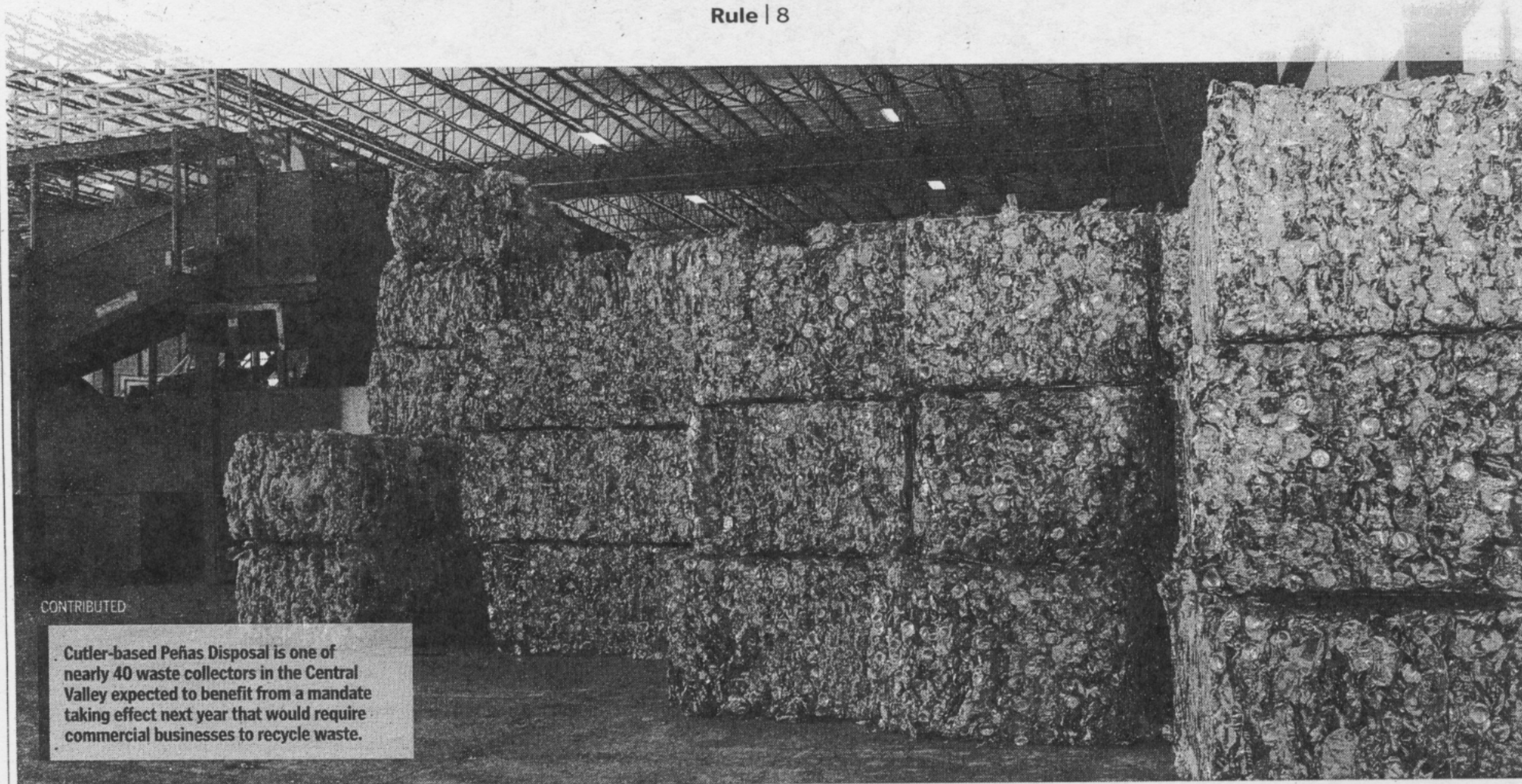
Many of the state's 560 or so collectors of waste — nearly 40 in the Central Valley — see opportunity in the new regulation.

With two recycling centers and blue bins set out for businesses throughout Tulare and Fresno county cities, Peña's Disposal based in Cutler takes in everything from cardboard, plastic, glass and green waste

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Cutler-based Peña's Disposal is one of nearly 40 waste collectors in the Central Valley expected to benefit from a mandate taking effect next year that would require commercial businesses to recycle waste.



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to carpeting and construction and demolition material with transfer stations hauling electronic waste.

But it's not enough just to direct folks to their nearest recycling station, said Peña's General Manager Carlos Garcia, as many businesses need more direct help in preventing a myriad of used goods from piling up in landfills.

"A lot of it is education and letting them know what can be recycled," Garcia said. "It's working with them so they work with the vendors they do business with to make sure they get materials that can be recycled."

Last April, Peña's was contracted by Tulare County as its designated recycler of construction and demolition debris. The first company in Tulare County to start a recycling program, Peña's was also approved last November to establish a hazardous waste collection facility in Cutler.

In 2009, Fresno diverted 74% of its waste from piling up in landfills, earning the designation as the No. 1 recycling city in the state by CalRecycle, then known as the Integrated Waste Management Board. That's well beyond the 50% diversion goal mandated in the Integrated Waste Management Act (AB 939) when it passed in 1989.

Grundfos Pumps in Fresno was one of eight businesses honored for their recycling efforts in November as part of the Mayor's Recycling and Zero Waste awards, diverting 93% of its trash from landfills, a marked improvement since beginning with wood pallets in 2000.

"We recycle just about everything we can, and not only just the business but we also have recycling facilities where employees can bring in things like (compact fluorescent light bulbs), batteries, cell phones," said Grundfos' Environmental Health and Safety Manager Malcolm Montgomery.

Kerman has also gotten aggressive with its commercial recycling activity, steering more than 18% of waste in that sector from landfills in 2010, up from 13% a few years ago. Like Fresno, Kerman will also award several groups and businesses for their recycling efforts last year, including Laundry Day, Valley Food, the Kerman Fire Department and La Vina Church.

More than 27.6 million tons of disposed waste in landfills came out of California's commercial sector in 2008, making up approximately 68% of all waste disposed, according to data from CalRecycle. More than 32% of that was corrugated cardboard while another 28% was composite paper.

More than 7 million tons of waste was disposed that year in the San Joaquin Valley from Shasta to Kern County. According to CalRecycle, the state as a whole leads the nation in recycling with a 59% diversion rate for all materials and creating more than 85,000 jobs through expanding recycling markets in the past 20 years.