

GUEST EDITORIAL

Mandated recycling: Another step toward zero waste

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As part of its sweeping legislation designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the State of California is mandating recycling for commercial businesses and multifamily residential.

The legislation, AB 32, impacts businesses and governmental agencies that generate more than four cubic yards of solid waste per week and multifamily complexes with more than five dwelling units. Beginning in July, these organizations will be required to recycle.

Research shows that the commercial sector generates nearly three-quarters of the solid waste in California, and much of that waste is recyclable. The state of California reports that increasing recovery of these recyclable materials will directly reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In particular, recycled materials can reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from multiple phases of product production; including extraction of raw materials, preprocessing and manufacturing. An added benefit is the reduction of methane emissions at landfills from the decomposition of organic materials. Use of composted organic materials also provides environmental benefits such as carbon storage in soils and reduced use of fertilizers, pesticides, and water.

California's stated goal is an additional 2 to 3 million tons of recycled material annually by 2020. Businesses can reuse, recycle, compost or otherwise divert solid waste from disposal in order to comply and help meet the goal. A property owner of a commercial business or multifamily residential dwelling may require tenants to separate their recyclable materials in order to comply.

Jurisdictions will be subject to review by CalRecycle and can face penalties if an agency has not made a good faith effort to comply with requirements for education and reduction.

Locally, businesses are finding that increasing their recycling efforts is paying off directly through the market value of the recycled materials and, because the amount of solid waste is reduced, their solid waste fees may be reduced.

The ultimate goal in the recycling world is Zero Waste. This concept centers on the idea that all products should be reused and recycled so we can dramatically reduce the amount of material that ends up in the landfill. This means changing our habits

and how we live our lives. For example, using both sides of paper, reusing cardboard boxes, purchasing products that can be reused and recycled and urging manufacturers to make products that can be reused and recycled.

Peña's Disposal unveiled the Zero Hero mascot at the Visalia Rawhide in April as the latest effort to encourage Tulare County residents to work together to implement zero waste programs at home and at work.

For businesses that will be subject to the new recycling requirement, the place to start is a waste audit. Business owners are often quite surprised to find out how much waste could be reduced, and the value of the materials they now pay someone to haul away.

Government intervention into how we run our businesses is not often appreciated. However, in this case, a rule that is forcing business owners to change their behavior is actually putting change in their pockets.