

Organic waste recycling ongoing

By Jackson Moore Updated 16 HRS AGO

An annual report by Peña's Disposal recommended a five-year extension to its city contract in response to new organic recycling needs.

Assembly Bill 1826, signed in Oct. 2014 by Gov. Jerry Brown, is now effective and requires some businesses to comply with organic waste recycling.

Organic waste includes food waste, green waste, landscape and pruning waste, nonhazardous wood waste and food-soiled paper.

The goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In the bill's current state only businesses that dispose of eight cubic yards of organic waste or more per week are required to comply and separate their organic waste.

In Dinuba, only Wal-Mart and Ruiz Foods currently fall under that category. Implementation is in progress at Dinuba Unified schools.

"For places that package food waste such as grocery stores, when they have to throw out produce, they're going to have to separate it from the plastic," Sherry Peña, business relations and development manager for Peña's Disposal Service, told the Sentinel last year. "So it's really only going to be a different way to think about it as well as the processes for it."

In coming years, the bill will also apply to multi-family housing units with five or more units and other businesses producing four or more cubic yards of organic waste. A dumpster of four cubic yards is considered to be medium-sized for businesses.

A representative of Peña's said, in result, they are attempting to obtain funding to create an anaerobic digest facility to process food waste from organic recyclables, build an infrastructure of containers, buy trucks, provide outreach for organic recycling and construct a bio-gasification plant to turn wood waste into renewable energy.

A five-year extension would make both Dinuba's agreement and Tulare County's agreement with Peña's the same length, making it more likely they can acquire grant funds, they said.

Costs could be between \$5 million and \$10 million and grants could cover as much as half of the funding.

Until facilities are built, Peña's transports organic waste to composters.

"Putting [organic recyclables] in the trash has a lot of environmental impacts," Nick Lapis, legislative coordinator for Californians Against Waste, told the Sentinel last year. "When you put it in the trash it makes methane. The methane that gets expelled from the landfills is very, very potent greenhouse gas."

Peña's also requested assistance from the city in implementing organic recycling requirements.

There has reportedly been resistance from some businesses to comply without consequences. Peña's also suggests one widespread implementation for coming regulations rather than implementing organic recycling in waves by business sizes. Several outreach ideas were presented to the city.

All of the requests are consistent with what Art Peña suggested to the city council in 2015. The council will consider a future agenda item on the matter.

Peña's also reported a large number of commercial locations in the city that are not in compliance with mandatory commercial recycling.

In 2014, 81 of 132 commercial accounts were not in compliance. That difference has decreased to 63 of 142 that are not in compliance as of June 2016.

In other reports, Peña's stated the city's diversion rate as of May 2015 at 69.2 percent. California requires a 50 percent diversion rate with a goal of 75 percent.

The diversion rate improved microscopically from 69.15 percent in 2014 despite a small increase in population.

Peña's also reaffirmed success in the three-cart disposal program implemented in 2014.

In 2015, landfill residuals decreased by 77 percent and recyclable totals increased by about 62 percent.

Those numbers have gone in the opposite direction in 2016, but are still significantly improved from 2014.

The biggest advances have come from residents recycling mixed paper and cardboard, which have jumped significantly this year.