



Agenda Report

TO: CCCSWA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: PAUL MORSEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 2009

SUBJECT: THE COMMERCIAL FOOD WASTE DIVERSION PROGRAM

SUMMARY

Over the past two years, the planning for and implementation of, a pilot program to separately collect and process commercial food wastes for an anaerobic digestion process at the East Bay Municipal Utility District's treatment plant has been proven technically successful. Although the ongoing pilot has proven to be feasible, as well as popular with a majority of participating businesses, it has encountered two issues that will likely delay expansion at the beginning of RY6, as originally planned:

1. The proposal from EBMUD to increase the disposal fee from \$32.50 per ton to an amount almost three times that.
2. Complaints made by EBMUD negotiators, a short time ago, that plastic (resulting from bags that contain collected food waste) is clogging their processing system requiring periodic clean-up, excessive labor and down time.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

1. Receive a presentation at the meeting providing more detail on the status of the program and what steps will be necessary to continue to move forward.
2. Continue moving ahead with phase two of the pilot program as planned (this effort is currently underway).
3. Delay formal implementation of the program pending resolution of the above cited issues.

DISCUSSION

Since its founding, the CCCSWA has devoted considerable efforts to maximize the diversion of residential (largely single family homes) wastes and special wastes such as batteries (due to State laws banning this commodity from the land-fill). These efforts have been largely successful and our CIWMB yearly diversion rate, now at or slightly above 50%, has us meeting state-wide goals. It is anticipated that the current State diversion goals will be increased from 50% to 60 or 70% in the near future. While improvements can always be made, such as the expansion of the Home Food Scrap Program into Walnut Creek, little more diversion can be extracted from the residential waste stream.

Information in our yearly reports to the CIWMB does, however, indicate a need to deal more vigorously with the commercial sector. Staff has identified commodities in the commercial waste stream for attention such as construction and demolition debris (C&D) through standardized C&D Ordinances and direction of these wastes to destinations that are able to recycle the materials from this activity. Commercial food waste comprises about 17% of the total waste stream. This waste is bio-degradable and as such can not only be diverted but after processing produce a usable product. Consequently, we need to continue our efforts to divert this waste from land-filling. Many other solid waste franchisors are dealing with the food waste component of their waste stream by planning and/or sending this material to composting destinations where a useful product is produced. While this approach results in diversion, some greenhouse gases are produced from this process, albeit less than if it was land-filled. Of course this option is and has been a possibility for Authority food waste and now that we have developed a “clean it at the source” approach for collection, we could direct the food waste to one of two destinations that we have looked at that could make compost from this waste.

In looking at our best options, the transport of food wastes to EBMUD for digestion not only diverts this waste from the landfill and produces a useful product, but captures the methane generated—a greenhouse gas—from escape into the atmosphere and utilizes it to produce electricity for treatment plant operation. It also allows the excess electricity to be directed to the grid. This is the “greenest” option for dealing with this commodity.

The two matters stated above, which are occasioning a delay, are worth the extra time and unexpected effort that will be necessary for their resolution due to the attractiveness of this unique program. The increased disposal fee appears to be manageable and will likely be resolved with continued discussion at the negotiating table, but until staff is comfortable with a mutually acceptable cost, we are reluctant to ask the Board to fully move ahead at this time. However, the plastics issue gives us pause as it will require continued testing of collected material for at least a two week period with the new grinder that is designed to produce a particle size that eliminates the problem of plastic bags fowling the EBMUD processing equipment. Due to this and the RY6 rate setting timetable, there is insufficient time to address this important issue. Staff will report to the Board on our efforts in dealing with the raised issues and make recommendations only after we are comfortable that the new grinder can produce a quality product for the intended destination.