

County supervisors fret over costs of state recycling mandate

January 22, 2020



Concerned that a new state mandate to recycle food and organic waste would be too costly to implement, Del Norte County Board of Supervisors directed staff last week to work with the Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority to devise best or alternative solutions to meet the state's requirements.

Solid waste director Tedd Ward discussed the background of State Bill 1383, which then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed in 2016, which sets state-mandated goals to reduce methane emissions and other short-term pollutants.

"This is a very significant law addressing organics," said Ward, "as it pertains not only to the responsibilities of the (solid waste agency) but also many county agencies and departments to fully implement.

"SB1383 is the most significant waste-reduction mandate to be adopted in California in the last 30 years."

Ward said implementing the bill would be costly for Del Norte County, since it might require as much as the construction of new waste collection facilities and mandating trash collection.

The objective of SB1383 is to reduce organic waste disposal by 75% and to increase food waste recovery by 20% by the year 2025. The challenge, Ward said, is that the bill has a much more prescriptive approach, limiting the county's flexibility "to develop the kinds of programs we think would make the most sense for our community."

"While we support the state's overall goals, in all honesty I believe we could probably craft a better set of programs for Del Norte and I intend to do so," Ward said.

"The reason I'm taking you through all this is, I need to start working with county staff and city staff to try to craft something that makes the most sense, and to make sure when advocating for programs that work for us

in Del Norte County we gather feedback, input and ideas.”

Ward said the state of California disposed of about 27 million tons of organic waste in 2017, and that organics comprise about half of all materials disposed. The organic waste deposited in landfills anaerobically decompose and produce methane gas, a more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide, he said.

He added that SB1383 comes with an implementation timeline, but that the counties can defer some of its requirements.

“This is a really significant lift because, at this time, we don’t have facilities to receive those materials, there are no established markets (for them), and the collection cost for separate organic and food waste is very, very significant.”

The key implementation dates:

- Jan. 1, 2020: A 50% reduction in organic waste disposal
- Jan. 1, 2022: Regulations take effect and state enforcement begins
- Jan. 1, 2024: Regulations require local governments to take enforcement
- Jan.1, 2025: A deadline for 75% reduction in organic disposal and a 20% increase in edible food recovery
- Dec. 31, 2026: Any rural organic collections exemptions expire.

By 2022, Ward said, the county must establish a food waste recovery program, conduct education and outreach, and prepare its first initial report in April and its annual report in October.

In 2024, SB1383 requires what and where those county organic waste recycling facilities are going to be, then provide organics collection services to all residents and businesses by 2026.

Ward said the Del Norte County Department of Environmental Health would be responsible for establishing an edible food recovery program, an education and community outreach program, and monitoring compliance and enforcement.

“These requirements cannot and will not be completed solely by the environmental waste authority,” he said. “Every local department plays a role in implementation, from public parks to public transportation.

“The state needs at least 50 to 100 new or expanded organic waste recycling facilities. That’s significant, because locating them, siting them and permitting them does not happen overnight.”

In addition, he said, SB1383 has prescriptive requirements down to the color of the collection bins and lids.

“While Recology does collect organic waste, this is not (currently) a requirement for all of the people who sign up for collection services.

“Probably the most significant thing at this point is that if we follow through with these requirements, we provide organics collection services as a county, it pushes us into mandatory collection. Meaning, if you live

in the county, you have to sign up for garbage service.”

As the scope of SB1383 sank in, the county supervisors began expressing concerns over its cost.

“I’m just blown away by what’s expected of us,” said District 2 Supervisor Lori Cowan. “We can’t even maintain what’s required of us on recycling. We’re still at 25% and we’re supposed to be 5%.

“It is very apparent that Del Norte County cannot take on this burden. What the state is requiring does not work for us. What is best for L.A. is not best for Del Norte County.”

“Surely the State of California is going to pick up the costs of all of this?” District 5 Supervisor Bob Berkowitz joked. Then, seriously, asked how Del Norte County, as a small community, is going to afford all that 1383 requires.

Ward said the state does have financial grants for some aspects of the program, such as a \$300,000 CalRecycle grant that’s already gone to the Community Food Council to address edible food recovery.

District 3 Supervisor Chris Howard said that in essence what CalRecycle is asking for is a cultural change in residents’ perspective of what is right and wrong. “It doesn’t happen overnight and it doesn’t happen just through education. It happens if they want to or it affects their bottom line,” he said.

“How fines will be levied in this process is a real concern to me. It might actually be cheaper, once we’ve gone through the direction that Solid Waste Management has given director Ward, to take a look at the impact of those fines versus the impacts of implementing a program like this.”

Local hemp farmer Jesse Davis was the only county resident who spoke during the public comment period regarding SB1383, and he took a more optimistic view of the bill.

Davis said a significant portion of the community would be interested in the materials created by an organics recycling program. “Plant-based foods are really valuable. A lot of people want vegan fertilizers. They fetch a high price in other places.”

At the close of the discussion, Del Norte County Administrative Officer Jay Sarina said he’s been reviewing Gov. Gavin Newsom’s proposed budget. “He seems to be sending a mixed signal. It appears he proposes cutting \$10 million out of the \$25 million budget for CalRecycle, specifically for waste diversion.

“I’m not quite sure what is going on with that and I will be taking a look at it.”