

*Eco-Tip for 8-11-18*

## **Annual Reports Show Recycling Accomplishments and Plans**

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Last week was the deadline for every city and county in California to send an annual report to the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle), describing and measuring local efforts to meet several state mandates related to recycling and waste disposal.

In many ways, the past year was difficult for recycling, on international, state, and local levels. Internationally, America's major export market for recyclables, China, stopped buying certain categories of plastic and paper and set difficult conditions for accepting other materials. On the state level, buyback centers for California Redemption Value bottles and cans have been closing, amid concerns about profitability, regulations, and operator complaints of insufficient subsidies from the state. Locally, Ventura County's only facility authorized to compost food waste had to reject that material, requiring long hauls to more distant compost facilities until a new facility can be built.

Nevertheless, each jurisdiction's report had many bright spots. Some categories of materials, such as construction debris, have never been exported for recycling, so these materials were unaffected by the international disruptions. State mandates have been in place for several years, requiring cities and counties to ensure recycling of construction debris, so the writing and monitoring of recycling plans for demolition, building, and remodeling is now incorporated into permit approval processes. Except for metal and cardboard, construction debris was never expected to have value, so recycling of this waste stream was not significantly affected by depressed recycling commodity prices.

The closure of recycling buyback centers made bottle and can redemption more difficult for those wanting their deposit back and those who collect cans and bottles to supplement their income, but every jurisdiction in Ventura County has convenient curbside recycling options for single family homes. For multi-family homes, every local jurisdiction has at least begun implementing Assembly Bill 341, which in 2011 required recycling be made available for any building with four or more units, with some exceptions for issues such as space availability. Separate mandates covering other recycling locations have also maintained programs, such as Assembly Bill 2176 of 2004, which requires recycling at large events and venues.

In these reports, local cities and the County also had to tell CalRecycle how they planned to meet mandates related to Assembly Bill 1826 (2014) and Senate Bill 1383 (2016). Both pieces of legislation require diversion of organic waste from landfills. In this case, "organic" does not mean produce grown without pesticides;

“organic” waste means discards capable of rotting. This rotting is not only a waste of resources, it is also a large source of greenhouse gas emissions. The 2014 piece of legislation requires businesses generating over 4 cubic yards of compostable material per week to arrange for separate collection of those materials, if possible, but since such collection programs are not yet widely possible in areas such as Ventura County, CalRecycle asks local jurisdictions how they plan to make it possible.

In Ventura County, on-site composting, composting on farms, and small compost facilities can handle some of the material, but most long-term plans look to the likely development of two major facilities over the next few years. The first, expected to open by early next year in Oxnard, will be a factory turning food scraps into animal feed. The second, proposed for opening within the next few years, is likely to be a major composting facility at the Limoneira Farm near Santa Paula.

Another effort to meet the organic waste diversion mandates is lead by Waste Free VC, a coalition of public agencies, non-profits, and businesses, administered by the Ventura County Public Health Department. Following receipt of a nearly half-million-dollar grant, the coalition has been working on various methods to save discarded food for human consumption. Members of the coalition have begun implementing programs ranging from enhanced “share tables” in school cafeterias to expanded food collection and distribution by groups such as FOOD Share.

Catered events, restaurants, bakeries, and food production facilities will present additional opportunities for food rescue. Eventually, a web site will facilitate volunteer assistance for collection and distribution of discarded food, but in the meantime, those interested in volunteering can contact the coalition’s program coordinator, Julia Blanton, at [julia.blanton@ventura.org](mailto:julia.blanton@ventura.org).

If you want to find out how your city or county is implementing and promoting plans to meet waste reduction mandates during a difficult period for recycling, ask your local recycling coordinator to email you a copy of your city’s report.

*More information:*

<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/lqcentral/AnnualReport/>