

Eco-Tip for 2/24/19

Food Waste Mandates and Opportunities

By David Goldstein, VCPWA, IWMD

“Eat everything on your plate; there are starving people in the world,” says the scolding parent.

“Then mail it to them,” says the smart-alecky kid.

Rather than mailing perishables, the Waste-Free VC Coalition, administered by the Ventura County Public Health Department, is working on more practical solutions. According to their motto, they aim to “eliminate hunger, recover food, and reduce waste” by finding ways to rescue food before it is disposed and distribute it to local people in need.

This Wednesday, February 27, the coalition will hold a meeting at the Public Health office, 2240 East Gonzales Road, suite, 200, in Oxnard, where partner agencies, non-profits, businesses, as well as prospective volunteers and the public, are invited to hear three guest speakers and plan next steps. One of those steps is to participate in the comment period – which closes on March 4 - for regulations stemming from Senate Bill 1383. This legislation, which passed in 2016, aims to reduce climate changing gasses, targeting reductions in food waste to cut emissions of methane from landfills.

Mandates for waste reduction, potential penalties for non-compliance, and incentives for food rescue will affect businesses, public agencies, and non-profits throughout California. FOOD Share is one of these non-profits and a member of the coalition. Through the Feeding America network, FOOD Share facilitates the collection and redistribution of a variety of food, including 11 million pounds of produce annually, feeding over 74,000 people per month. However, due to environmental health regulations requiring response times and resources beyond current capacity, FOOD Share is rarely able to accept or direct prepared food, so one upcoming initiative of the coalition will be to recruit volunteers who can transport prepared food on short notice.

For example, FOOD Share currently collects surplus or dated packaged food from supermarkets, but those same supermarkets must dispose unserved food from deli counters at the end of the day. If instead, volunteers can be called upon to transport the prepared food to specified locations ready to receive and serve it, waste can be reduced and many more people in need can receive sustenance.

Catered events, restaurants, bakeries, and food production facilities will present additional opportunities for food rescue. Eventually, a web site will facilitate the good deeds of collection and distribution, but in the meantime, those interested in

volunteering can contact the coalition's Program Coordinator, Julia Blanton, at Julia.blanton@ventura.org

Approximately 18% of the waste we put into local landfills is food, ranging from peels and pits to unserved salads, according to statewide averages based on sorting at several facilities (one of which was in Oxnard). Until recently in Ventura County, much of the methane gas escaping from food and other waste rotting in local landfills was captured in pipes and converted into energy, but starting October 1, 2016, this consolation prize for waste was eliminated due to high costs of implementation and the low value of energy. Now flares destroy nearly all the harmful gasses the landfill operators can capture. Uncaptured methane is "more than 25 times as potent as carbon dioxide at trapping heat in the atmosphere" according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency's web site.

Of course, preventing waste in the first place is more efficient than managing it after it is discarded. Run your refrigerator like a business, with a first-in-first-out inventory control system. Store dairy products on a top refrigerator shelf; the door space is too warm and should be used only for condiments. Store meat on the bottom shelf, the refrigerator's coldest zone. Also, separate fruits from vegetables, and use a higher humidity setting for vegetables. Wash fruit only right before eating (not before storage). Clean shelves to prevent mold. Notice the difference between "use by" or "best if used by" on food packaging; the former will indicate potential problems if kept longer, and the latter will indicate minor concerns such as flavor.

On the net:

www.foodshare.com

www.epa.gov/gmi/importance-methane

<https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/organics/food>