

## **Development of a Regional Waste Management Solution**

### **Overview**

Since 2009, the Resource Recovery & Waste Management Division (RRWMD) has led the effort to develop a comprehensive regional waste management plan and facility.

### **Challenge**

The immediate challenge facing the region was the dwindling capacity of the Tajiguas landfill, which was calculated to reach capacity and close in 2026. Given the region's geographic isolation, lack of landfill space, and the unlikeliness of siting another local landfill, the County's Board of Supervisors directed that RRWMD actively explore alternatives to landfilling waste. The County also needed to develop infrastructure to comply with mounting state requirements to keep food scraps and organics out of the landfill, and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In short, there was a compelling need to develop a comprehensive regional waste management facility. Project goals included diverting material from the landfill, increasing our community's recycling rate, generating resources like green energy and compost, and dramatically lowering local GHG emissions.

### **Solution**

After consultation with our regional partners and the affected communities, aided by a broad outreach plan that included over 150 public presentations, the County chose to build an Anaerobic Digester (AD) and a Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) at the site of the County owned and operated Tajiguas Landfill called the ReSource Center.

### **Innovation**

The ReSource Center is, to the best of our knowledge, the first operation in California that will combine a large scale AD and a MRF at a landfill. Through co-location, this project has the environmental and economic benefits of minimizing truck and transportation needs.

RRWMD was both persistent and innovative in overcoming scores of challenges over this project's ten year development. The solutions required skillful coordination of regional interests, undertaking a comprehensive public outreach plan, conducting a thorough environmental review process, and acquiring the public financing for what is the County's largest single capital project to date.

## **Results**

The result is that the Southern Santa Barbara County region now has a long-term, environmentally superior waste management plan. Construction is underway on the ReSource Center, which should be operational in early 2021. After ten years of planning and negotiations, the groundbreaking in December of 2018 was a huge milestone.

The ReSource Center will serve 210,000 area residents and businesses, divert an additional 60% of waste from the landfill, reduce GHG emissions by annually removing the emissions equivalent of 28,668 cars, produce enough energy to power 2,000 homes annually, and create 100 permanent living wage jobs.

This project will process an estimated 155,000 tons of MSW and 35,000 tons of recyclables each year, increasing the County's recycling rate to over 85%, and will result in an estimated reduction of over 130,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent each year.

The AD facility will process organic materials, including food, wet paper, and yard trimmings, into over 18,000 tons of compost and soil amendment products per year. The combined facilities will give the community flexibility to modify its collection systems as needed in the future.

## **Replicability**

California is waging an aggressive campaign to reduce GHGs while removing organics from landfills, and the ReSource Center's combination approach to the processing of organics and other recyclables is worth studying by any jurisdiction that lacks the infrastructure to comply with current and future state mandates. The elements of transparency and long-range planning that have characterized the ten-year journey from conception to groundbreaking, are certainly worth emulating for any jurisdiction facing similar challenges.

**Contact:** Leslie Wells, Deputy Director of Public Works