

Major improvements underway at Monterey Regional Waste Management



Juan Carlos Zepeda, from right, Andres Fernandez, Javier Ayala and Sergio Morales sort recyclable items inside the Materials Recovery Facility at the Monterey Regional Waste Management District in Marina on Friday. The facility is set to be upgraded to recycle a higher percentage of intake. David Royal - Monterey Herald

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Monterey Regional Waste Management District workers drive equipment as customers dump garbage in the tipping room in the Materials Recovery Facility in Marina on Friday. From there the materials are moved by conveyor belt to a sorting line. David Royal - Monterey Herald

Marina >> The Monterey Regional Waste Management District is on track to become greener and more efficient.

A \$34 million bond issue will fund three major infrastructure improvements at the Marina facility. They aim to help the district process more recyclable materials faster and produce compressed natural gas to fuel the trucks that pick up garbage.

Those trucks will be different in seven of the district's nine agencies beginning this year. GreenWaste Recovery of San Jose was the low bidder for the service.

The district's improvement projects are being made because the equipment currently being used is 20 years old and because the state has mandated the recycling and reuse of more trash. By 2020, the state expects waste management districts to divert 75 percent of all organics from landfills. Organics are materials that decompose, or anything that would typically go into a composter, such as coffee grounds, spoiled fruits and vegetables and other garden and kitchen wastes.

The most expensive of the three improvement projects is replacement of the district's materials recovery facility, or MRF. It will cost \$21 million.

The current materials recovery facility processes and separates about 70,000 tons of reusable material a year. The new equipment will process about 150,000 tons a year, said Tim Flanagan, the district's assistant general manager.

"Technical improvements allow them (district workers) to optically sort plastics," Flanagan said. "A beam of light hits a bottle and sends it off in a different direction, depending on what type of plastic it is."

The new facility also will be able to differentiate between types of paper, such as newspaper and cardboard, Flanagan said.

Other benefits include improved processing of construction and demolition materials; a new commercial waste processing line to remove remaining recyclables and organics not separated when they first arrive at the facility; and a single stream capacity to process higher value recycled materials from residences and businesses.

"This technology is in place in two dozen or more facilities in the state," he said.

Flanagan said the new equipment will produce several new jobs at the facility and will serve the district for the next 20 years.

The second project is a truck parking and maintenance facility for GreenWaste Recovery trucks. The company won the franchise for trash hauling in the first competitive bidding process in the district in 40 years.

The parking and maintenance facility will be built on 10 acres at the Marina site. It will cut down on travel for trucks and allow them to be maintained in one area. The \$9 million project is expected to be completed by November.

The third project is the compressed natural gas fueling station at the truck parking and maintenance area. The \$4 million plan will use landfill waste to produce methane which will then be converted to compressed natural gas.

Trucks will begin and end the day at the site. "It's really sort of a perfect closed loop," Flanagan said, resulting in a negative carbon impact.

To begin with, said William Merry, district general manager, trucks will be fueled by natural gas from a Pacific Gas & Electric Co. pipeline. But by mid-2016 the fuel from the waste system will be up and running.

The six district agencies that will be signing on with GreenWaste Recovery are Sand City, Del Rey Oaks, Marina, Seaside, Carmel and Pacific Grove. Monterey and Pebble Beach Community Service District will not be part of the franchise. (MRWMD note, PBCSD is part of the new franchise and there are 7 agencies participating)

Service will start in Sand City first (on April 1). Pacific Grove will be the last to start (on Aug. 1).

A big push this year in the district will be the collection of organics. Flanagan said the district found that 40 percent of all trash that goes into the district's landfill is organic. That's material that can be converted to fuel.

So the district and GreenWaste Recovery will be working with apartments and small businesses to start separating that material in containers that trucks will collect.

The Monterey Regional Waste Management District was formed in 1963. Last year it received six awards for such efforts as clean air, organics, innovation, transparency and for being an outstanding public agency.

"I think one of the hallmarks to our success over the years has been the forward thinking of our board," Merry said. "They've been very supportive."

The district, he said, has started new innovations small and grown them. For instance, the district's Second Chance Mercantile store, where usable items brought to the facility are sold, began small. Now it pays for itself with \$800,000 a year in revenues, which help pay 10 employees.

An anaerobic digester was a pilot program in the beginning as well as being the first in California and the second in the U.S. It creates methane gas that creates electricity, which is used by the Monterey Regional Water Pollution Control Agency.

Merry, who will retire in May after 33 years with the district, feels he's leaving the agency in good shape. The district finished the year debt-free and the landfill is good for another 150 years.

"It's been a pleasure to serve the district," Merry said. "It's like a permanent construction project. I've gotten a huge amount of satisfaction of doing what I do here."

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