



CITY OF COSTA MESA

CALIFORNIA 92628-1200

P.O. Box 1200

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

September 3, 2024

To: The Honorable Judge Maria Hernandez
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

From: Mayor John Stephens
City of Costa Mesa
77 Fair Drive
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

Dear Honorable Judge Hernandez,

Below is the City of Costa Mesa response to findings within the Grand Jury Report, Talking Trash: Recyclables and Organic Waste, dated June 11, 2024.

FINDINGS

F1. The majority of Orange County jurisdictions have not yet required their haulers to distribute residential containers that meet the CalRecycle standardized colors, leaving legacy and often incorrect or illegible labeling and embossing in place.

The City of Costa Mesa does not oversee residential waste services.

Residential waste service is provided by Costa Mesa Sanitary District (CMSD). CMSD is in the process of transitioning from a two-container system to a three-container system. Beginning October 7, 2024, through – December 2024, CMSD will be delivering blue recycling containers to all CSMD customers. The new, blue recycling container meets CalRecycle's color and labeling requirements (blue lid and sticker label on the lid that explains which materials are allowed and prohibited). When the District implemented their Organics Recycling Program in 2015, customers received organics carts with green lids. The franchise hauler currently distributes organics carts that meet CalRecycle's color and labeling requirements (green lid and sticker label on the lid that explains which materials are allowed and prohibited). During the three-cart rollout, existing mixed-waste containers will be relabeled as landfill carts. Existing mixed-waste carts that do not meet CalRecycle's color requirements will be replaced with black-lid landfill carts when container replacements are requested by residents (and all prior to 2036).

F2. While a jurisdiction may not delegate its overall responsibility for compliance with State requirements to a hauler, some jurisdictions have designated the task of imposing and

collecting fines from residents to the hauler in accordance with State law. However, not all jurisdictions are clear on who ultimately receives and retains the collected fines.

Commercial generators may be fined for non-compliance. However, franchised haulers may level contamination fees after two instances of non-compliance are noted. Therefore, it is unlikely non-compliance would continue to the point where the City would have to step in. The City prioritizes educating all constituents on proper waste disposal and recycling habits rather than issuing fines.

CMSD has yet to determine if the District will issue fines for residential non-compliance. If CMSD Board of Directors elects to move forward with a fee/fine structure, the franchise waste hauler may issue contamination fees and the District may issue administrative fines. The District would retain administrative fine revenue and 80% of contamination fee revenue, to be placed in the District's Solid Waste Fund. The franchise waste hauler would retain 20% of contamination fee revenue.

F3. All jurisdictions will eventually start collecting fines from residents for noncompliance, but some have not yet determined whether the revenues will go into a waste and recycling enterprise fund or into the jurisdiction's general fund.

Any waste related fine revenue received by Costa Mesa will go into the general fund. The City prioritizes educating all constituents on proper waste disposal and recycling habits rather than issuing fines.

If CMSD opts to assess fees/fines for residential customers, fee/fine revenue will be placed into CMSD's Solid Waste Fund.

F4. In most jurisdictions, education and outreach is a joint effort between jurisdiction, hauler, and sometimes consultants, with the jurisdiction reviewing the materials before publication. The methods of dissemination vary by jurisdiction and hauler but frequently rely on a resident actively seeking the information, which requires the resident to have some awareness of the new mandates in the first place. Most efforts primarily revolve around intermittent hard-copy paper mailings.

Education material is provided by haulers and the City in numerous ways to multi-family and commercial customers via direct mailers, recycling related web pages, bill inserts, social media, and public outreach events. The City holds sustainability efforts in high regard and hosts an annual Earth Day event. This event includes education on proper waste disposal and recycling practices.

CMSD residential customers receive outreach via the District's webpage, flyers, postcards and letter mailings, Mesa Water District bill inserts, social media, emails to subscribers, press releases, newsletters, CMSD's annual Compost Giveaway & Shredding Event and Eco Expo, booths at community events, and town hall meetings. CMSD continues to find mailings effective for residents, since a 2023 Community Survey conducted by CMSD found that 62% of CMSD customers prefer to receive information from CMSD in the mail.

F5. Most jurisdictions currently have no way to accurately determine the effectiveness of their respective education and outreach efforts other than the eventual inspections or audits that will take place.

The City of Costa Mesa agrees with the finding. As organics recycling becomes the norm for jurisdictions throughout Orange County, disposal and diversion reports will determine how effective outreach efforts are.

F6. There is some concern that there are not enough composting facilities in Orange County to process all organic waste, forcing some jurisdictions/haulers to transport it long distances for processing.

The City of Costa Mesa agrees with the finding.

F7. There is currently no infrastructure in the county that is a State-approved source of Renewable Natural Gas (RNG) and energy from organic waste. Jurisdictions that use vehicles running on RNG procured from non-approved sources cannot count that RNG towards fulfillment of their procurement requirement.

The City of Costa Mesa agrees with the finding.

F8. The formula used by the State to calculate a jurisdiction's procurement target does not account for a jurisdiction's population density or geographic size (square miles). As such, meeting the annual procurement target presents a significant challenge for most jurisdictions.

The City of Costa Mesa agrees with the finding.

F9. Many Orange County jurisdictions were unable to meet the requirement in SB 1383 to reduce organic waste sent to landfills by the 2020 deadline. It is unlikely the required seventy-five percent reduction will be achieved by the 2025 deadline.

The City of Costa Mesa disagrees partially with the finding. Although State models have shown an increase in organics diversion in recent years, forecasting 2025 diversion rates is difficult. Outreach and contamination monitoring will play a role in meeting the 75% percent reduction goal.

F10. The current procurement requirements mandated by SB 1383 are unrealistic and likely unachievable by most jurisdictions.

The City of Costa Mesa agrees with the finding. The demographics of Costa Mesa pose a challenge to the City meeting its procurement target due to the high number of multifamily properties and limited space.

Below is the City of Costa Mesa status on recommendations made within the Talking Trash: Recyclables and Organic Waste, dated June 11, 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. All jurisdictions should expedite the acquisition and distribution of residential containers that meet the CalRecycle standardized colors. Additionally, until the compliant containers can be distributed, all jurisdictions should ensure the distribution of labeling for non-compliant containers that explain the current SB 1383 requirements applicable to their jurisdiction by June 30, 2025.

The recommendation will be implemented as CMSD has started the roll-out of its three-container system by asking residents to submit preferred cart sizes. By the end of 2024, residents will have SB-1383 compliant recycling (blue lid) containers and organics (green lid) containers. Mixed-waste containers will be relabeled as landfill containers during the three-cart rollout (October – December 2024). Non-functional legacy landfill (mixed-waste) containers will be replaced with SB-1383 compliant (black lid) containers as residents request replacements. The District has not yet determined a deadline to replace any remaining legacy containers (non-compliant color) still in circulation.

R2. By December 31, 2024, all jurisdictions should ensure their waste hauling agreements are in compliance with State statute so that haulers may be designated to perform certain required tasks but are not improperly delegated overall responsibility for compliance. Additionally, all jurisdictions should ensure that any fines collected by a hauler are forwarded to the jurisdiction.

The recommendation has been implemented. The City of Costa Mesa updated its franchise waste haul agreements to align with State mandates. These updated agreements went into effect January 2022.

Costa Mesa Sanitary District updated its franchise waste hauler agreement, effective January 2023, to align with State mandates. If CMSD elects the franchise waste hauler to collect contamination fees, 80% of the revenue will be forwarded to CMSD. Any administrative fines would be issued by and retained by CMSD.

R3. The OCGJ recommends that all jurisdictions utilize a dedicated waste and recycling enterprise fund for collection of fines for non-compliance with SB 1383 by December 31, 2024.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. In the event fines are assessed, Costa Mesa will not have a specific fund dedicated to the collection of fines for non-compliance, but will track and monitor revenue generated by fines.

If CMSD opts to assess fines for residential customers, fine revenue will be placed into CMSD's Solid Waste Fund, which is considered an enterprise fund.

R4. By December 31, 2024, all jurisdictions should diversify the methods and media used for education and outreach to include, among others, various social media platforms, emails to residents, newspaper, television, flyer mailings, community events, and appearances at other public gatherings.

The recommendation has been implemented. The City of Costa Mesa provides print and electronic education materials via hauler contracts, public website, social media, and outreach events, such as its annual Earth Day event.

CMSD residential customers receive outreach via the District's webpage, flyers, postcards and letter mailings, Mesa Water District bill inserts, social media, emails to subscribers, press releases, newsletters, CMSD's annual Compost Giveaway & Shredding Event and Eco Expo, booths at community events, and town hall meetings.

R5. By December 31, 2024, and in order to gauge the effectiveness of their education and outreach efforts, all jurisdictions should develop new methods to engage residents directly to help determine their awareness of the requirements associated with SB 1383, such as surveys, online quizzes, and door-to-door polling.

The City implemented education and outreach programming utilizing diverse methods. We believe further actions, such as contamination notices and related outreach material, will prove effective in raising awareness.

CMSD conducts a biennial Community Survey. The most recent survey conducted in 2023 assessed residents' awareness of SB 1383, how often residents put food waste into their organics cart, if they think separating organic waste to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is important, and if they support the implementation of the Three-Cart Collection System. The District plans to continue assessing these topics in the 2025 survey. CMSD plans to continue exploring new methods of outreach and education. The 2023 survey results, along with past survey results, are available for public viewing on CMSD's website at https://www.cmsdca.gov/news_publications/customer_survey.php.

R6. By June 30, 2025, the OCGJ recommends that all jurisdictions participate in the OCW&R-led efforts to develop a coordinated county-wide approach to the organics recycling infrastructure and programs as well as procurement requirements associated with SB 1383, working towards creating circular economy as a long-term goal.

The recommendation has been implemented. A Costa Mesa City representative attends all meetings and discussions hosted by OC Waste & Recycling. In addition, a CMSD representative attends all meetings and discussions hosted by OCW&R.

R7. By December 31, 2024, the Orange County Board of Supervisors and all Orange County cities should lobby appropriate members of the State Legislature and/or CalRecycle to revise

the organic waste diversion targets to better reflect Orange County's waste amounts, revise the jurisdictions' procurement requirements to better represent the limited options currently available for procurement, the jurisdictions' varying populations, population densities, and geographic size, and to delay associated enforcement actions by the State.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be considered as City staff develops its legislative priorities for 2025.

Should you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to contact the City of Costa Mesa's Solid Waste Coordinator, Kevin Gaxiola, at 714-754-5303 or by email at Kevin.Gaxiola@costamesaca.gov.

Sincerely,



Mayor John Stephens
City of Costa Mesa

- C Costa Mesa City Council
- Lori Ann Farrell Harrison, City Manager
- Raja Sethuraman, Public Works Director
- Patrick Bauer, Deputy Public Works Director
- Kevin Gaxiola, Solid Waste Coordinator
- Scott Carroll, General Manager, Costa Mesa Sanitary District