



ANGELES CHAPTER

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News Release

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Sierra Club Report Examines Food and Yard Waste Management in Los Angeles and Orange Counties

Cities must make better use of organics to prepare for new statewide recycling goals and Puente Hills landfill closure

LOS ANGELES - The Sierra Club Angeles Chapter recently surveyed cities in Los Angeles and Orange counties to better understand what the region is doing with discarded food scraps and yard trimmings, known as “organics.” The effort titled “The Organics Project” produced a report detailing its findings from the 23 cities that participated in the initial survey.

The Organics Project report comes at a critical time with a looming landfill closure and statewide recycling goals in flux. Jeremy Drake, Project Lead for The Organics Project, said the closure of the Puente Hills Landfill in October will send millions of tons of material to other local landfills every year. “This material should be mulched or composted, not landfilled,” Drake advised, “With compostable organics comprising one-third of our waste stream, municipalities need to examine and improve their management practices now more than ever.”

The study found that nearly 90 percent of cities surveyed send their yard trimmings to landfills for use as landfill cover. Hillary Gordon, chair of the Angeles Chapter Zero Waste Committee, said that most local residents know they are required to separate yard trimmings from other waste in their curbside bins. What is not well known, according to Gordon, “is that despite these efforts, much of this ‘green waste’ is hauled to local landfills where it is dumped on top of garbage every day as landfill cover.”

Under an old state law, cities receive waste diversion credits for dumping yard trimmings into landfills—amounting to more than 1 million tons in Los Angeles and Orange counties every year. Many cities in the Greater Los Angeles region rely on such credits to stay compliant with state waste diversion mandates, however, these credits may be revoked, and fines will begin to accumulate on non-compliant cities. Under the new 75% statewide recycling goal, cities that continue this form of organic waste disposal could face up to \$10,000 per day in fines.

The study also found that 75 percent of cities surveyed wish to adopt composting or other environmentally sound alternatives to landfills for the management of organics. As a result of decomposing organic matter, landfills are the nation’s third largest man-made source of methane, which has 105 times the climate change potential of CO₂ in the critical near-term 20-year time frame. Cities have an opportunity to contribute to the fight against climate change by redirecting organics elsewhere.

The study indicated that several effective organics management programs already exist across the region, although

implementation is inconsistent from city to city. While over 50 percent of the cities surveyed have enacted environmental policies, few policies articulate sustainable organics management goals.

Two cities—Calabasas and Santa Clarita—stand out for recently adopting composting as the primary means for managing organics, while a small number of the cities contacted do not know how any of their discards are managed and therefore were unable to report on their organics management practices.

Of the 23 respondents, the cities of Burbank and Irvine lead the pack by having the highest number of sustainable organics management policies and programs in place, while the cities of Artesia and Fullerton have the fewest.

“The Sierra Club’s analysis of organic waste practices presents an opportunity,” said Drake. “Cities can choose to make a change in their organics management practices and join those that are leading our region to a more sustainable future. The Organics Project report gives us a look at who is leading the way and how.”

The Organics Project: http://angeles2.sierraclub.org/zero_waste_the_organics_project. A detailed report of the findings may be found at: <http://bit.ly/WU24FQ>

*The Angeles Chapter is the local voice of the **Sierra Club**, America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. Its 40,000 members in Los Angeles and Orange Counties strive to explore, enjoy and protect nature in their communities and the planet. Learn more about the Angeles Chapter at www.angeles.sierraclub.org.*

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