



DATE: June 11, 2020

TO: Planning Committee/Recycling Board
Programs and Administration Committee

FROM: Meghan Starkey, Senior Management Analyst

SUBJECT: Final Report: Grant Report on Compost Contamination Reduction Pilot

SUMMARY

In 2018, the Bay Area Air Quality Management, through its Climate Protection Grants Program, awarded \$263,000 to the WMA for a compost contamination reduction pilot project. This project undertook a full scale, technological approach to identifying and reducing contamination in the City of Livermore's commercial organics collection program. The grant was a public/private partnership between the WMA, the City of Livermore, Livermore Sanitation Incorporated, Compology, and Diversion Strategies. At the June meetings, staff will present the outcomes of the project and share lessons learned.

DISCUSSION

Commercial composters are dealing with increasing contamination due to poor sorting by the generators. Since diverting organics is a top priority for the agency, and the fact that even a small amount of contamination can undermine product quality and drive up costs, ongoing contamination poses a significant risk to the effectiveness and cost of organics diversion programs. Technology at the processing site is expensive and not effective enough to provide a long-term solution in and of itself. For these reasons, composting infrastructure and contamination is one of the issues identified in the recently adopted Countywide Integrated Waste Management Plan.

In 2018, Livermore's organics processors began rejecting all of Livermore's commercial loads, deeming contamination levels unacceptably high. In response, the partners undertook a comprehensive, year-long effort to reduce contamination by commercial organics customers in Livermore.

At the center of the project was the installation of cameras in the organics bins, with photos uploaded to the cloud three times daily. Each day, the customer service representative at Livermore Sanitation reviewed the photos, identified possible contamination, and followed up with the customer directly that same day. Contact was through phone calls, site visits, or texts, depending on the customer and the contents of the photo. In addition to positive actions, such as trainings,

Livermore Sanitation also implemented contamination fees. These fees were in addition to the usual WMA routine Mandatory Recycling Ordinance inspection program, which can include monetary fines.

The implementation of these elements was aligned in order to test the strength of different types and combinations of interventions. The year-long project included a weight based sampling study, with a baseline and four quarterly sampling events, and was supplemented by other analysis to determine overall effectiveness.

Full results will be presented at the meeting, with the key finding being that the project demonstrated – through statistically significant findings – that the approach is an effective means to reduce contamination.

RECOMMENDATION

This item is for information only.