



**Date:** April 22, 2020

**TO:** Waste Management Authority Board

**FROM:** Wendy Sommer, Executive Director

**SUBJECT:** COVID-19 Related Changes

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This memo outlines the changes we are seeing to our work as a result of the shelter in place orders and broader implications of COVID-19. While certain project activities have been altered, we continue to strengthen our waste prevention messages and find ways to support our constituents and member agencies.

#### Staff and Board

All staff are working remotely and we have moved to virtual staff meetings. As noted below, our activities that are field based have been suspended or shifted to virtual learning. Board meetings are virtual as allowed under the Governor's order.

#### Reusable Bags and Food Ware

The Reusable Bag Ordinance is not currently being enforced as a result of the Alameda County Public Health Department shelter in place order that prohibits establishments from allowing customers to bring their own reusable bags. Guidance has been posted on our website that refers to the order and we will continue to monitor the situation and adjust accordingly.

Public health orders have severely restricted food service operations and influenced public perception on the safety of reusable food ware. We intend to launch reusable food ware pilot projects once food service operators have resumed normal business and recovered from the impacts of the pandemic.

#### Grants/Grantees

Community Outreach Grantees are either stretched thin distributing food to residents or forced to close down during the shelter in place. Their contracts have been extended for six months so that they have time past the crisis to complete grant deliverables. We will adjust implementation timelines and provide additional sanitation protocol support for funded packaging-related projects.

Implementation of the heat pump water heater grant has been slowed down as all water heater replacements right now are emergency only, but we can reach more contractors at this time as they are less busy than before due to restrictions on work.

### Communications, School and Community Outreach

Communications is adjusting the focus of social media on direct actions that people can take at home during the pandemic and shelter in place conditions. The posts are performing well. Topics include:

- Food storage tips to make food last longer, waste less, and reduce trips to the grocery store
- Sustainable gardening tips to help first-time gardeners get started with planting edibles and posts about building healthy soil with compost
- Virtual garden tours from our staff and community to inspire people to garden - whether in an indoor container or in a backyard
- Ongoing reminders to sort properly and keep it clean, such as a reminder that wipes go in the garbage
- Guidance on home cleaning projects to properly save and store items for donation and HHW drop off until services resume

Similar messaging is being shared with schools audiences, where we have shifted to a virtual Earth day program: 20 Actions to Earth Day 2020. Teachers can integrate the program into their distant learning while providing earth-friendly activities students and their families can engage in to take collective action at home.

Community outreach staff continues to provide resources on getting the most out of food, growing food and gardening with compost through garden side chats, virtual garden tours, how-to videos on Instagram and Facebook, as well as providing digital Earth Day packages for partners across the county.

### Mandatory Recycling and Fee Enforcement

Enforcement inspections, mailings and in-person technical assistance have been suspended due to the shelter-in-place order. Free indoor food scraps bin program new approvals and deliveries are on hold, as well as free sticker mailings.

An increase of tonnage is expected due to temporary closure of MRFs at WMAC/Davis St. Transfer Station and Fremont Recycling and Transfer Station (recyclables being sent to landfill), though this may be offset by a decrease in commercial tonnage.

### Organics

For compost and mulch, we are shifting from in-office lunch and learns to a webinar for a broader audience of landscape architects and contractors through partner organizations.

Research and monitoring for the carbon farming project is currently on hold while our partners at the Alameda County Resource Conservation District prepare a safety plan.

SB 1383: CalRecycle has pushed back the release of the next draft of regulations and other elements. CalRecycle has also received many letters asking for delays or suspensions on SB 1383 or other statewide recycling requirements.

The Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance training has been moved to an online format.

Food: Our food system has been dramatically impacted by COVID-19 from farms to stores to restaurants. The typical channels of production and distribution have been disrupted, resulting in wasted food. Restaurants are trying to stay alive through take out and other means. Our Smart Kitchen Initiative sites have halted food waste tracking.

There are huge labor and volunteer shortages in Food Recovery Organizations. Groups are having to drive farther to find food donations, further impacting labor and increased cost for fuel and transportation. We are planning to provide emergency grants to help support their efforts.

Stop Food Waste campaign media has shifted messaging from a focus on food waste's impact on climate change to a focus on making the most of your food: tips on storage, extending life of food, meal planning and shopping.

#### Energy Council

The BayREN multifamily technical assistance team is pausing in-person visits in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are continuing remote program operations where possible for existing projects, and will continue to process new applications. The Green Labeling program is offering realtor continuing education programs virtually instead of in-person.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

This item is for information only.