

California Progress Report

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California Air Resources Board Has Barely Scratched the Surface of Recycling Measures Needed to Implement AB 32 on Global Warming

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Californians Against Waste strongly supports the Air Resources Board's decision to include landfill gas capture as one of the 3 discrete Early Action Measures (EAMs) that will be implemented by January 1st, 2010. However, by focusing on controlling the small number of landfills that do not have gas capture systems, the Board missed an opportunity to achieve other substantial and cost-effective greenhouse gas reductions from the waste sector.

Ton for ton, recycling reduces more pollution, saves more energy and reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions more than any other solid waste management option. Despite a robust materials collection infrastructure, Californians disposed over 42 million tons of solid waste in 2004. Over 60% of these materials were recyclable, and, when disposed, they generated very significant greenhouse gas emissions. A modest 25% reduction in disposal of materials commonly collected in curbside programs could deliver 5 MMTCO₂E of GHG reductions, an amount equal to over a million cars not being driven every year.

Recycling reduces GHG emissions in two important ways. First, recycling keeps materials out of the landfill, thus avoiding methane emissions. Early action measures that reduce methane emissions will yield greater immediate results than CO₂-based strategies alone because methane has 23 times the climate forcing potential of carbon dioxide and a lifespan of only 12 years. More importantly, recycling reduces the emissions associated with the mining, processing, and transportation of virgin resources.

Recycling is also widely accepted and has a proven economic track record. Increasing recycling will achieve significant GHG reductions without investment in new technologies or systems. Increasing the flow through California's existing materials recovery and recycling infrastructure will also generate significant economic benefits. The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) has estimated that recycling has twice the economic benefit of landfilling the same material.

Recycling is one of the few activities that allows ordinary citizens and businesses to take proactive steps to protect their environment. It is widely accepted, readily implemented, and can deliver significant GHG reductions.

Expansion of Curbside Recycling: Residential waste accounts for 32% of California's overall waste stream. Paper, cardboard, glass and metals are among the most prevalent materials in the residential waste stream. Despite its popularity and effectiveness, just half of California residents have access to convenient and cost effective curbside recycling, and we believe this opportunity should be provided for every household in California (single and multi-family).

Expansion of Commercial Recycling: Commercial waste accounts for 47% of California's overall waste stream and readily-recyclable cardboard and paper are the most prevalent materials in commercial waste (making up over 26% of the materials disposed by commercial enterprises). Over the last decade, thousands of California businesses have seen their waste management costs reduced through the establishment and expansion of commercial waste recycling. However, for many medium and small businesses in California, there remains a disconnect between the waste they generate on a day-to-day basis and the portion of their business overhead costs which go to waste management. There is a very high potential for increased recycling at commercial enterprises and we believe they should be required to obtain recycling services.

Material-Specific Disposal Limits: A surprisingly small number of readily-recyclable materials (e.g. corrugated cardboard and mixed paper), account for the lion's share of California's GHG emission reduction potential. In addition to those materials disposed through residential and commercial

collection, approximately 20% of disposed waste is hauled directly to the landfill by residents and businesses. Of this material, over half is readily-recyclable construction and demolition debris (C&D). Material-specific disposal limits would require all Californians to limit their disposal of recyclable materials such as cardboard, paper, or C&D, regardless of whether it is collected by a refuse company or self hauled to the landfill.

Waste reduction and recycling represents an opportunity to reduce existing emissions from landfills, as well as the emissions from mining and transporting virgin products. While the EAMs adopted yesterday only scratched the surface of potential greenhouse gas reductions from the waste sector, we hope that future actions by the ARB and CIWMB will recognize the global warming benefits of recycling. We simply can not afford to keep wasting the materials that are ending up in our landfills.

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