

**MEMORANDUM
DEPARTMENT OF FACILITY SERVICES
COUNTY OF PLACER**

To: **BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

Date: **AUGUST 18, 2009**

From: *JD* **JAMES DURFEE / WILL DICKINSON** *(initials)*

Subject: **RESPONSE TO THE 2008-2009 GRAND JURY REPORT – BLUE BAG
RECYCLING PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize the Chairman to sign the attached response to the Placer County Grand Jury's 2008-2009 Final Report.

BACKGROUND: On June 24, 2009, the Placer County Grand Jury issued its 2008-2009 Final Report. The report included an assessment (attached) of the Blue Bag recycling programs utilized by the Town of Loomis, City of Auburn, City of Lincoln and the County of Placer. There are two recommendations that require responses:

- 1) Eliminate the Blue Bag program within western Placer County.
- 2) Jurisdictions within western Placer County should notify their residents of the effectiveness of the recycling process at the Western Placer Waste Management Authority's (WPWMA) Material Recovery Facility (MRF) versus the limited effectiveness of the Blue Bag program.

Unlike the programs offered by the cities, the County does not provide free bags or extensively advertise a Blue Bag program. On a strictly voluntary basis, customers of Auburn Placer Disposal Service (APDS) that are residents of the unincorporated areas of western Placer County can purchase blue bags at local stores. They can put source separated recyclables in the blue bags and place the bags either adjacent to or inside their garbage collection container. After collection by APDS, the bags are pulled out and processed separately at the MRF.

Staff has prepared the attached draft response to the Grand Jury to address the recommendations from the Final Report.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE: The recommended action is not considered a "Project" under the California Environmental Quality Act.

FISCAL IMPACT: Continuing to allow APDS customers to utilize blue bags as a voluntary method of recycling has no fiscal impact to the County.

JD/WDL/M

ATTACHMENTS: BLUE BAG RECYCLING PROGRAM ASSESSMENT
DRAFT LETTER RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS

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County of Placer Board of Supervisors

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August 18, 2009

The Honorable Alan V. Pineschi
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
County of Placer County
P.O. Box 619072
Roseville, CA 95661

RE: PLACER COUNTY 2008-2009 GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

Dear Judge Pineschi:

Placer County wishes to thank the members of the Grand Jury for their efforts associated with the investigation of the Blue Bag program operated by Placer County through its Solid Waste Handling Agreement with Auburn Placer Disposal Service, in the unincorporated portions of Western Placer County.

Responses to the Grand Jury Recommendations:

1. Due to the recyclable recovery efficiency at the MRF, all Blue Bag Programs within Western Placer County should be eliminated.

The County agrees that the new MRF expansion has greatly improved recovery of mixed waste recyclable materials. The County also agrees that the blue bags comprise a small percentage of the total volume of waste processed and that termination of the County's program would not significantly impact achievement of the State of California's mandated waste diversion goal of 50%. For these reasons, the County does not provide blue bags or make a significant effort to promote this recycling option.

On the other hand, County staff continues to receive phone calls from residents that are not comfortable with placing all of their recyclable materials in the same can with their garbage. Often these people have recently moved to Placer County from large urban areas that offer curbside collection of recyclable materials. The Blue Bag program provides these people with an option for recycling that fits their lifestyle and personal goals without cost to the County. As noted in your report, it can also provide a cost savings to the customer because the blue bags may be placed outside the trash container, thus allowing the customer to use a smaller receptacle at a lower monthly cost.

The County of Placer will continue to offer the Blue Bag option on a voluntary basis for those residents that express an interest. County staff will attempt to notify these interested residents that the MRF works very efficiently and that the blue bags are not currently recycled.

- 2. All Western Placer County jurisdictions with Blue Bag Programs should notify their residents that their time, effort and expense marginally increase, if at all, the amount of materials recycled. The notice should educate the public on the effectiveness of the recycling process and the collection of comingled materials at the MRF. The notification could be a direct mailing or inclusion in the billing.**

The County of Placer conducts extensive outreach and education to its residents on the many aspects of the solid waste handling and recycling efforts conducted within the County. Information is provided through websites, billing statements, distribution of flyers for specific special events, appearance at local events, and radio and print ads. Outreach provided stresses the effectiveness of recovering comingled and source separated (primarily green waste) materials at the MRF. County outreach efforts will not be aimed at promoting the Blue Bag program in Western Placer County.

The County appreciates the opportunity to respond to the recommendation in the report.

Respectfully,

F. C. "Rocky" Rockholm, Board Chairman
Placer County Board of Supervisors

WS:kw

Cc: James Durfee
Bill Zimmerman

BLUE BAG RECYCLING PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

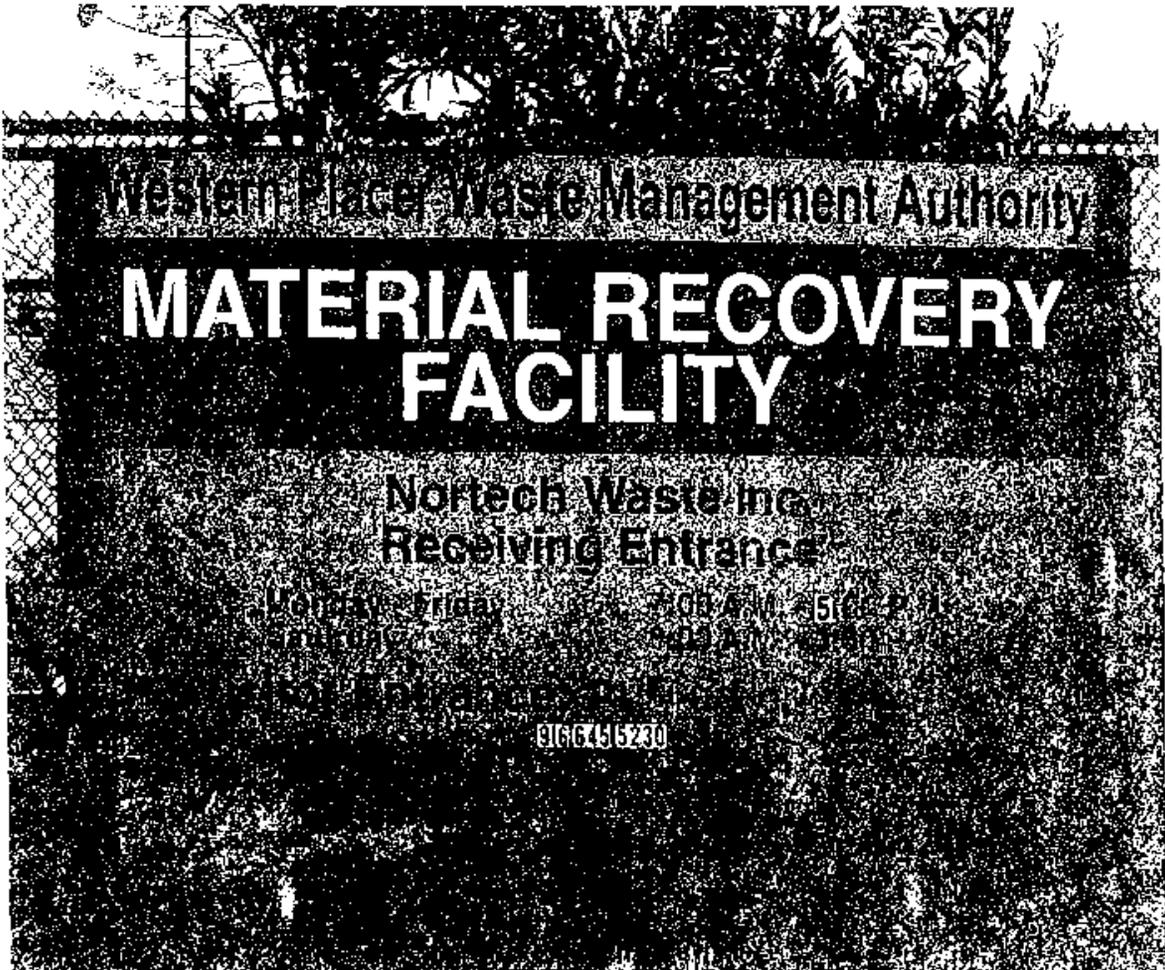


Photo by Wm. Gray

BLUE BAG RECYCLING PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Summary

Four jurisdictions in Placer County utilize a voluntary Blue Bag Recycling Program. These are the cities of Auburn and Lincoln, the Town of Loomis, and unincorporated areas of Placer County. Residents and businesses place clean and dry recyclables in blue bags that are commingled with regular trash and transported to the Western Placer Waste Management Authority's Materials Recovery Facility for processing at a later date. The 2008–2009 Grand Jury agrees with last year's Jury in its recommendation that all Blue Bag Programs be eliminated. Because of the responses received from the cities of Lincoln and Auburn, this Grand Jury reinvestigated the program and determined the residents' time, effort and expense were of marginal value to any of the jurisdictions' recycling programs while additional costs were incurred in processing intact bags.

Background

The 2007–2008 Grand Jury, in response to questions from residents concerning the effectiveness of the Western Placer County recycling program, conducted an investigation of the Western Placer Waste Management Authority's (WPWMA) Materials Recovery Facility (MRF, pronounced "Murf") in January 2008. That Grand Jury found the MRF to be well managed and using state-of-the-industry equipment and technology. The recyclable materials commingled with the other trash and garbage were easily and efficiently sorted, collected and packaged for sale.

The California Integrated Waste Management Act of 1989 (AB 939) mandated that 25% of refuse be recoverable by 1995 and 50% by 2000. Soon after, some Placer County jurisdictions started Blue Bag Programs that allowed citizens to voluntarily place clean recyclable items in blue plastic bags that were commingled with trash container contents. The bags were pulled off the sorting lines at the MRF and saved for later processing.

The 2007–2008 Grand Jury found the Blue Bag Program contributing marginally, if at all, to the overall recycling program. Because the MRF processes all commingled refuse so efficiently, that Grand Jury recommended the jurisdictions eliminate the Blue Bag Programs.

Opposition responses from the cities of Auburn and Lincoln caused the 2008–2009 Grand Jury to reopen the investigation into the viability of the Blue Bag Programs.

Investigation Methods

On October 17, 2008, Jurors met at the MRF, listened to a presentation by Eric Oddo, WPWMA Senior Civil Engineer, asked questions and completed a tour of the entire facility. It began on the receiving floor where the trucks dumped the loads, then proceeded up to the next level where the receivables were sorted and recyclables collected. The tour ended where the refuse materials had been collected and readied for the landfill and recyclables compressed and packaged for sale. Jurors returned to the MRF in December to specifically follow the blue bags' path from the receiving floor and along the sorting line conveyor belts.

Jim Durfee, Executive Director of WPWMA, and Jim Estep, Lincoln City Manager, were interviewed in January 2009. Mr. Estep was accompanied by staff members, John Pedri and Steve Ambrose. Jurors asked about Blue Bag Program costs and its contribution to the recyclable recovery efforts.

Facts

In their written responses to last year's Grand Jury report, the cities of Lincoln and Auburn disagreed with the 2007–2008 Grand Jury's recommendation to eliminate the Blue Bag Programs. Lincoln administrators stated the program elimination would require a substitution, such as a third can for recyclables, to meet its goals. Auburn's Mayor, Keith Nesbitt, stated, "The blue bag is a valuable educational tool that allows our citizens to participate in the recycling process at their home which naturally increases their awareness of waste issues." Jim Durfee indicated, in his written response, that the WPWMA would maintain a neutral position and process blue bags as long as jurisdictions elected to continue their programs.

In a January 2009 Grand Jury interview, Lincoln officials maintained the Blue Bag Program's elimination would require it to be replaced with an alternative program.

Although they said they had not determined the requirements of the California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB), the officials again mentioned a third can program as a replacement or the possibility of using a facility other than the existing MRF.

Mr. Durfee testified to this Grand Jury that the benefits of the Blue Bag Programs are marginally positive and are cost neutral to Placer County. The participating jurisdictions and the public bear the costs. As he stated previously, the WPWMA maintains a neutral position and will process blue bags as long as programs exist.

The CIWMB recently approved the 2006 Diversion Rates and Lincoln achieved 60% by implementing 35 programs. In comparison, Rocklin achieved 58% implementing 31 programs and does not have a Blue Bag Program. There are 63 potential diversion programs listed by CIWMB. All jurisdictions in Placer County exceeded the State-mandated 50% Diversion Rate except the Town of Loomis. It received a board approved good faith effort of 48%.

Roseville and Rocklin, the two largest cities in Placer County, do not have Blue Bag or any other curbside sorting programs. Green waste is placed in a separate container.

The MRF in Placer County is classified as a "dirty MRF" waste processing facility and accepts refuse as a mixed solid stream. This type of treatment technology accepts waste and recyclable materials mixed together. All the garbage comes into the facility and a combination of mechanical methods, including shakers, screens, magnets, etc., is used to sort and collect materials. In addition, workers manually sort and collect recyclables from the trash as it moves along on the conveyor belt lines. Separation occurs within the plant rather than at the source or curbside. After all the recyclables are collected, the remaining waste material is transported to the landfill for disposal.

At the curbside or other collection point, a commingled refuse container is dumped into a collection truck, hauled to the MRF and the contents dumped onto the receiving floor. When blue bags reach the sorting lines, employees are instructed to retrieve the blue bags and drop them in a separate bin. At a later time, after sufficient numbers of bags have been accumulated, the filled bins are returned to the receiving floor and the bags are run through the same process as regular trash. The employees tear open the bags and shake the contents out onto the belts. The belt speed is reduced to a very slow pace so all recyclables can be retrieved.

The WPWMA's addition of the MRF in the 1990's and its updating with the latest equipment and technology available in mid 2000's has increased its recycling capability and efficiency. The present processing system is effective and nearly all recyclables commingled with regular trash can be retrieved.

Within Western Placer County there are four jurisdictions presently implementing voluntary Blue Bag Programs. The programs began in the early 1990's prior to the modernization of the MRF, when resident participation was needed to separate recyclables from other trash. All four jurisdictions require recyclable items placed in the bags to be clean and dry, including various paper products, plastic/glass bottles and aluminum/tin cans.

The MRF processes the refuse collected from all of Placer County west of the City of Colfax. The Town of Loomis, City of Auburn and unincorporated areas of Placer County utilize the Auburn Placer Disposal Service (APDS) to pick up and transport refuse. The City of Lincoln collects its own trash and delivers it to the MRF. The Town of Loomis and City of Auburn provide residents blue bags at no charge and APDS delivers them. Lincoln residents are provided free bags, costing the City \$26,000 per year. Blue bags must be picked up at City Hall. Unincorporated area residents of Western Placer County must purchase blue bags at grocery stores. The filled bags are expected to be placed inside the container. Otherwise, the APDS driver will exit the cab to retrieve blue bags placed alongside a full container. The City of Lincoln requires filled blue bags to be placed inside the garbage container.

Blue bags comprise only a very small percentage of the total volume of processed refuse at the MRF. A large portion of the blue bags do not make it to the sorting lines in a retrievable condition. They are often ripped open by the sheer weight of the contents, items in the bag, sharp objects, compaction in the truck, etc. The bags provided to the residents for no charge tend to be made of thinner plastic than the purchased types and are torn open very easily. The blue bags themselves are presently not recyclable and are sent to the landfill.

Jurors observed the blue bags in various conditions when they started the path from the receiving floor to the sorting lines. Employees may retrieve an intact or partially damaged blue bag containing recyclables at any point after it reaches a sorting line belt

and before it drops off the end of the line. In general, the bags can be categorized in the following ways:

- Bags are not retrievable and are treated as regular garbage:
 - Bags are badly damaged with no contents.
 - Bags are damaged and all contents fall out when grabbed by a sorter.
 - Bags are partially intact and all contents may be dislodged with a little shaking.
- Bags are retrievable and saved for sorting at a later date:
 - Bags are damaged but some or all the contents remain after it is grabbed.
 - Bags are not damaged at all.

Jurors had been told that all retrievable bags would be removed from the belts, saved and processed later. However, Jurors observed that some retrievable bags passed every worker on the line, dropped off the end of the belt and the unrecovered recyclables went to the landfill.

One benefit resulting from the programs served by APDS is that bags are allowed to be placed alongside a full trash container, making space available inside for additional trash.

Findings

1. The MRF, with its updated equipment and use of technology, is a very well managed and efficient recycling facility. Its recyclable recovery program is improved marginally, if at all, by the Blue Bag Programs.
2. Making residents aware of the value of recycling is beneficial. However, Jurors found no evidence the time, effort or money spent on the Blue Bag Programs by residents contributed anything significant toward achieving the recycling goals of the jurisdictions.
3. Since the MRF is classified as "dirty", any handling of separated recyclables, such as filled blue bags, adds to processing costs. Jurors found the blue bags added to the total cost of recycling programs in at least three ways.
 - a) The bags cost the residents money either directly by purchase or indirectly through town or city purchase.
 - b) Extra time and labor are required to retrieve bags placed alongside full containers.
 - c) Extra time and labor are required to process saved bag contents at a later time.

4. ~~One negative aspect to eliminating the Blue Bag Program is that in some~~ jurisdictions residents will lose the benefit of placing blue bags next to the full container. The extra space can save residents money by allowing more trash to be disposed of without paying for an additional container.

Recommendations

1. Due to the recyclable recovery efficiency at the MRF, all Blue Bag Programs within Western Placer County should be eliminated.
2. All Western Placer County jurisdictions with Blue Bag Programs should notify their residents that their time, effort and expense marginally increase, if at all, the amount of materials recycled. The notice should educate the public on the effectiveness of the recycling process and the collection of comingled materials at the MRF. The notification could be a direct mailing or inclusion in the billing.

Request for Responses

- Spencer Short, Mayor / #'s 1, 2 - Due by September 1, 2009
City of Lincoln
600 Sixth Street
Lincoln, CA 95648
- Mike Holmes, Mayor / #'s 1, 2 - Due by September 1, 2009
City of Auburn
1225 Lincoln Way
Auburn, CA 95603
- F. C. "Rocky" Rockholm, Chair / #'s 1, 2 - Due by September 1, 2009
Placer County Board of Supervisors
175 Fulweiler Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603
- Walt Scherer, Mayor / #'s 1, 2 - Due by September 1, 2009
Town of Loomis
6140 Horseshoe Bar Road, Suite K
Loomis, CA 95650
- Jim Durfee, Executive Director / #'s 1, 2 - Due by October 1, 2009
WPWMA
11476 C Avenue
Auburn, CA 95603