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Big Changes in Trash Collection Begins March 1

By Sophie Braccini



Ken Etherington pointing to labels that will be embedded in the new trash carts. Photo Sophie Braccini

Lamorinda residents will begin to see the new RecycleSmart logo on garbage receptacles starting March 1, but it's not just the Central Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority logo that's changing. With a new executive director, Ken Etherington, new franchise agreements and new services for all categories of users, the public agency is taking a big step and aligning itself to meet the California objective to divert 75 percent of its waste stream by 2020.

Starting in March, residential clients can recycle plastic bags, batteries, CFL bulbs, and all types of plastic containers. Aside from batteries, all other recycling will be available for multi-family units as well, including food waste, which will be accepted in new green containers. Commercial clients will also have standardized recycling services that will be part of the weekly collection.

Etherington is confident that the new services will help the agency reach the 75 percent diversion goal. The new director started working for the San Francisco Garbage Company part time in high

school, and after graduating from UCSF he got his first full-time job there and continued his career in that industry. He says he likes the environmental side of the business, as well as the operational aspects, and he also enjoys the public involvement.

"In Berkeley, I was the division manager for solid waste and recycling," he says. "There the agency is a full-service operation that does collection, recycling, and trucks to the landfill." Etherington has been meeting weekly to prepare for the transition with Republic Services, which will handle the collection, transfer and disposal of residential and commercial garbage.

One of the first changes for users is going to be the new trash cart colors. "The green cans stay green," explains Etherington, "the non-recyclables carts are black, and the recyclables are blue." Somewhat confusing, when the regular trash carts are now blue. "Blue for recycling is becoming a standard," he explains, "and all the cans will have embedded labels that will show what goes in each container." He is confident that the shift in colors won't be confusing, but changing 207,000 containers will take time. "The switch will take about two months," states Etherington. He explains that the new carts will be delivered the day before collection, people will take them to their homes, then on the next collection day the trash and the old containers will be taken away.

Moraga and Lafayette residents will keep the same pickup day, but a percentage of Orinda residents will experience a day change. Etherington promises extensive outreach to inform those residents. There will also be three different trucks powered by compressed natural gas on pickup days, which will result in less trucks and less trips altogether because each load will be optimized, says Etherington. "Timing may be different from what people are used to, so make sure your carts are out before 6 a.m. on pickup day," warns Etherington.

Multi-family and commercial RecycleSmart customers should benefit from a wide outreach campaign. "For multi-family units we are offering new food recycling containers and also recycling bags to transport their recyclables to the new containers," says Etherington. Two staff members will be in the field conducting training and answering questions. "In person contact, not only mailers, are key to getting [customer] buy-in," says the director.

Currently, multi-family units recycle 21 percent of their trash, commercial customers recycle 47 percent and residential customers 65 percent. Reaching a total of 75 percent within five years is not going to be easy - the residential recycling rate has not seen much improvement since 2011. "We need to keep reminding people that they can recycle the food waste in the green waste container," says Etherington. As for batteries and CFL bulbs, residents should put them in a clear zip-lock bags and set them on top of their recycling cart.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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