



ECO-LOGIC

Newsletter of the
Tri-City Ecology Center

April 2016

Volume 46 Number 4

Converting Biosolids-to-Energy Will Reduce Landfill Waste

By Senator Bob Wieckowski

California wastewater agencies generate about 2.75 million wet tons of biosolids each year. The biosolids are the natural by-product of wastewater treatment. They are often used in agriculture or for daily cover of landfills. Neither of these options are long-term sustainable operations. Local, state and federal regulations are becoming increasingly stringent and restrictive, and fewer counties are accepting biosolids.

But significant potential exists to convert this by-product into a renewable source of energy to help California reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve state and federal environmental goals. That is why I am authoring Senate Bill 1213, supported by the Bay Area Biosolids-to-Energy Coalition (BAB2E), a joint powers agency consisting of 19 wastewater treatment agencies, including the Union Sanitary District. The bill would create a Biosolids-to-Energy Program at the California Energy Commission. The Senate Energy, Utility and Communications Committee recently passed the bill with bipartisan support.

California has adopted a goal to reduce landfill waste by 75 percent by 2020. Governor Brown has called upon the state to reduce fuel consumption by 50 percent and reduce GHG emissions by 40 percent by 2030 from 1990 levels. The Governor has also called upon the state to increase the amount of electricity derived from renewable sources to 50 percent.

SB 1213 will help accomplish all four of these goals. It will continuously provide \$20 million from the state's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to the California Energy Commission to administer a competitive grant program, beginning in the 2016-2017 fiscal year. The grants will require a 50 percent local match.

To help handle the projected increase in Bay Area biosolids product, BAB2E has a shovel ready biosolids-to-energy project in the Dublin San Ramon Services District, one of its member agencies. This effort is in part to preclude a possible biosolids management crisis as landfill disposal of biosolids and land application become less of an option over time. Currently, the BAB2E agencies truck biosolids over one million miles per year. The investment of GGRF funds will stimulate development of the technology to convert the biosolids into clean energy and substantially reduce the number of miles driven.

A public-private partnership between BAB2E, state government, and private enterprise to demonstrate a commercial-scale biosolids-to-energy project is consistent with California's leadership in promoting and creating cutting-edge renewable technology.

SB 1213 will be a catalyst for the conversion technology and will, over the long term, help drive down costs and provide a higher and better use for biosolids.

Senator Wieckowski represents the 10th Senate District, which includes southern Alameda County and northeast Santa Clara County.