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'User fee' to encourage recycling

Board approves \$20 charge, effective May 1

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SAN LUIS OBISPO - Failing to recycle may not be a crime, but it's tantamount to a fineable offense at one local landfill.

In what may be one of the first fees of its kind in California, the Cold Canyon Landfill in San Luis Obispo will begin charging customers an extra \$20 if they bypass recycling bunkers and go straight to the open face of the landfill.

"It now gives a financial incentive to people to want to recycle," said Tom Martin, general manager of Cold Canyon.

Only around 10 percent of customers typically refuse to recycle, he estimated, but they often become adamant, insisting they are within their rights to dump their unsorted trash directly into the landfill.

Starting May 1, though, they'll have to pay the \$20 "user fee" every time they do so. That's on top of the usual fees, which start at \$12 for a load of up to 500 pounds. Certain items -- such as appliances and mattresses -- are extra.

The county Board of Supervisors approved the new fee Tuesday as part of its consent agenda, which means the item passed without any discussion.

Martin doesn't expect the landfill will take in much money from the new fee. Most customers, he predicts, will decide to comply, which is exactly what waste management officials hope will happen.

Lanny Clavecilla, spokesman for the state Integrated Waste Management Board, an agency which oversees the recycling law, said he's unaware of any other landfill in California charging an additional fee for not recycling. He added that his agency is not involved in the setting of fees.

All landfills in California are under a state order to reduce the amount of trash buried in landfills by 50 percent. Those that fail to comply can face penalties of up to \$10,000 per day.

In San Luis Obispo County, the 50 percent reduction has been achieved. The county is recycling 50.2 percent of its garbage, Martin said, but that's down from a previous calculation of 51 percent.

"That's not good. We're going the wrong way," said Martin, who also oversees local garbage companies.

About a year ago, Cold Canyon installed separate containers for recyclables, including cardboard, wood, green waste, metal, bricks, and bottles, cans, papers and other assorted waste. To make unloading easier, Martin suggests customers sort their recyclables before making a trip to the landfill.

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