

STR looking at recycling alternatives

By Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe Refuse is working on ways to be compliant with the California mandate that by 2020 75 percent of what it collects must be diverted from the landfill.

This means looking at different bins for recyclables and then possibly retrofitting trucks to make this work, as well as expanding what the South Lake Tahoe-based company currently recycles.

“We are working on how to implement food waste throughout the service area,” John Marchini with STR told *Lake Tahoe News*.

There has been a program in place with select restaurants for a number of years to collect food scraps. More recently the collections have spread to schools on the South Shore. Finding a way to have individual customers recycle food waste is the next goal. Food waste is taken to Full Circle Compost in Minden where it is then repurposed.



South Tahoe Refuse may move from blue bags to totes.

Photo/LTN

At the Waste Management Joint Powers Authority meeting this

month, STR officials agreed with the board to conduct a survey of customers about recycling.

Several moving parts are in play. One is that people with bear boxes would not be able to accommodate the totes normally used by consumers to toss recyclables. The other is how much the change would cost and who would pay for it. Dealing with vacation rentals is always an issue. And another concern is whether the expense for all of this would have the desired payoff of actually capturing more recycling material.

“We don’t want to see a rate increase without greater diversion,” Jeanne Lear with STR told the JPA board.

Marchini said it’s possible the totes may only be able to capture between 1 and 2 percent of the recyclables that currently end up in the landfill. Refuse officials said it would cost customers an additional 50 cents per month with a subsidy from the JPA for totes and retrofitting trucks, or 68 cents without the subsidy.

This board – made up of Nancy McDermid from Douglas County, JoAnn Conner of South Lake Tahoe and Norma Santiago with El Dorado County – was encouraging to go the route of totes.

“Less plastic is always good,” Conner said.

A handful of years ago STR started using blue bags. These plastic bags, which are recyclable, are good for paper, cans, bottles and the like. Food waste is a big no-no for blue bags.

The JPA has been subsidizing the blue bag program. There is \$75,000 in the 2014-15 budget for blue bags. If that allocation is not all used, the board this month agreed it could go toward with a pilot tote program dependent on results of the survey.

The rest of the trash goes through a conveyer belt, with recyclable material sorted by hand.

Totes are the type of cans that are able to be lifted and dumped by a garbage truck. (Today, STR employees pick up each can and dump it into the truck.) Marchini said if the company goes to totes, those recyclable bins would be picked up every other week, while regular garbage service would remain weekly. A concern is if vacation and second homeowners were to leave them out for that extended time because they could attract animals.