CITY OF DEL MAR

SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

EDCO: Family-owned and locally-operated hauler of Del Mar's waste

Prepared by the Sustainability Advisory Committee

Did you know that EDCO stands for Ed's Company named after its founder, Edward "Ed" Burr?

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Information about the ins and outs of the City's waste haulder's operations—and this tidbit—was shared with the members of the Sustainability Advisory Committee (SAC) during a January 29th tour of EDCO's Escondido recycling and anaerobic digester facilities. The SAC was welcomed by Steve South, President and Chief Executive Officer of EDCO, and Dawn Cox, Environmental Coordinator.

Since the summer of 2022, organic recycling in Del Mar has included curbside collection of food waste along with green waste, in compliance with State Bill 1383, which aims to conserve landfill space while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Residents are asked to add their food waste to their yard cuttings for curbside pickup. Steve South understands that asking people to change their handling of food waste in the kitchen is sensitive. He suggests that "the best idea is the one you come up with"—meaning that people should do what works well for them in their kitchen.

EDCO processes the collected organic waste in two large anaerobic digesters (AD), where microorganisms, steady agitation, and a 131° environment decompose the organics without oxygen. The digesters come from Switzerland, where limited land availability for landfills has encouraged waste haulers to innovate new technologies.

- The physical output of the AD is called "digestate," which is a mixture used by local farmers as fertilizer.
- Bio gasses, including methane, are captured in the digestion process. The natural gasses are injected into SDG&E's gas grid after ensuring compliance with its purity requirements. The natural gas generated by EDCO can power 70 of its trucks. In the future, EDCO plans to generate enough hydrogen from its ADs to power its fleet with fuel cells. This will accommodate the driving range and significant weight of the trucks when fully loaded, while complying with the upcoming zero-emission for heavy-trucks requirements in California.

On the left, commingled green yard cuttings and solid kitchen waste mechanically shredded after arrival at the facility. In the center, under the belly of one of the anaerobic digester. On the right, “digestate” as it exits the digester. It is used as fertilizer by local farms.

Steve South illustrates EDCO’s role as a catcher in baseball, receiving all sorts of materials and methodically sorting it. During the visit, the SAC noticed plastic bags and other contaminants both in the green waste and in the recyclables. Knowing that a single plastic bag can stop the entire recycling operation by jamming the several stories-high conveyor belt system, it is important to avoid discarding plastic bags in the recycling bin.

On the left, plastic found in organic recycling. This should have gone in the trash. In the center, Styrofoam made it into the green waste bin. Styrofoam goes in the recycling bin (not the pellets, however, which go in the trash). On the right, recycled material unloaded at EDCO’s sorting facility. Note all the plastic bags that will be removed as they cannot be recycled by EDCO.

When discussing recycling, one frequent question is about the final destination of the recycled materials. The value of recycled materials seems to determine the likelihood of local recycling. For example, a large bale of compressed aluminum cans is worth $4,200, the highest value on the recycling market. Aluminum, glass, plastics, and expanded polystyrene (or Styrofoam) are recycled in the US, while lower-valued items such as fiber (shipping and cardboard boxes) and metals are sent to Asia.

On the left, a worker pulls out plastic bags from the conveyor belt and puts them into a vacuum tube to remove them from recyclable materials. In the center, workers sort through recyclables and non-recyclable items. On the right, large bales of aluminum cans ready to be recycled elsewhere in the United States.

EDCO serves multiple cities within the San Diego, Orange and Los Angeles counties. Despite expansion over time, the company wants to retain its small, family-like operations. Entire families work for EDCO as part of the group of 1,600 employees. The civic-minded workers recently provided flood relief after January storms by clearing mud and debris from impacted neighborhoods.

In closing, EDCO's commitment to sustainable waste management, as evidenced by their innovative practices and future-oriented plans, is not only transforming the way we handle waste but also shaping a greener future. The tour underscored the need for each of us to do our part, whether it's properly sorting our waste or rethinking our use of materials like plastic bags.

For more information on:

- Clothing and toys disposal, check out the Del Mar Go Green website
- Sorting your waste, visit EDCO's tool Where Does it Go?
- Recycling plastic bags, visit Waste Free SD