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Community Green Waste Diversion Program:

A Sustainable Solution for Tuolumne County

Introduction

Tuolumne County faces significant challenges in managing residential green waste. Current disposal methods—including open burning, backyard composting, and hauling to green waste facilities—are not always efficient or environmentally friendly. Illegal dumping in remote areas also remains an issue. To address these concerns, the Community Green Waste Diversion Program offers a structured and sustainable approach to green waste management.

Program Objectives

The program is designed to:

- Reduce the open burning and landfiling of residential green waste.
- Increase compliance with defensible space requirements, enhancing community safety.

Challenges in Green Waste Management

Managing green waste in Tuolumne County presents several obstacles:

1. **Rural Landscape:** Large properties generate more green waste than can fit in curbside collection totes.
2. **Limited Facilities:** There are no commercial composting facilities in the county. The existing green waste facilities are concentrated around Sonora, limiting accessibility for residents in outlying areas.
3. **Transportation Barriers:** The cost and distance required to transport green waste to facilities can discourage proper disposal.
4. **Limited Market Options:** While a local biomass facility accepts chipped woody waste, it does not accept common residential yard trimmings, leaves, or pine needles.

Program Implementation

To overcome these challenges, the Community Green Waste Diversion Program will be piloted in Firewise communities, which already have structured volunteer programs. The initiative follows these key steps:

1. **Reusable Yard Sacks Distribution:** Residents will receive reusable yard sacks to collect their green waste. Woody waste is separated and staged separately.
2. **Community Collection Points:** Tuolumne County Solid Waste/Public Works will provide a dump trailer at a predetermined community site. For larger projects, a community may elect to rent a 20- or 30-yard debris box at their own cost.
3. **Volunteer Support:** Community volunteers will collect the filled yard sacks and load them into the dump trailer or debris box. Woody waste will be placed in a separate staging area.
4. **Transportation & Disposal:** Tuolumne County Solid Waste/Public Works will transport the trailer to the Earth Resource Facility, utilizing the county's 1,000-ton annual allowance to cover disposal fees. The County will also cover the disposal cost of up to 30 cubic yards of green waste if a debris box is rented.
5. **Woody Waste Chipping:** After the event has concluded, the Tuolumne County Sheriff's DDC Work Crew will chip the woody waste on-site, then deliver it to a green waste diversion or biomass facility.

Benefits of the Program

This initiative presents numerous advantages:

- **Environmental Protection:** Reduces harmful open burning and illegal dumping.
- **Cost Savings:** Residents benefit from a structured, no-cost green waste disposal option.
- **Community Safety:** Enhances defensible space compliance, mitigating wildfire risk.
- **Resource Recovery:** Redirects green waste from landfills to productive uses, such as biomass energy and soil enhancement.

Conclusion

By implementing this Community Green Waste Diversion Program, Tuolumne County is taking a proactive approach to sustainable waste management. The pilot initiative in Firewise communities will help refine the program and set a precedent for expansion across the county. With community participation and structured logistics, this program has the potential to significantly reduce green waste-related issues and promote a cleaner, safer environment for all residents.

For more information on the program, please contact the Tuolumne County Solid Waste Division at (209) 533-5588 or email pw@co.tuolumne.ca.us Subject: Green Waste.