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San Gabriel Valley Tribune (San Gabriel Valley, CA)

September 12, 2004 Sunday

**SECTION:** OPINION

**LENGTH:** 517 words

**HEADLINE:** Trash by rail viable solution

**BODY:**

GOOD news came to the county Thursday as a major obstacle to trash by rail was removed. It was a case of county, state and local governments coming together. The decision promised to change the face of the San Gabriel Valley/Whittier region.

The City of Industry joined with the county Sanitation Districts to provide a spit of land adjacent to the Puente Hills Landfill garbage-sorting plant set to open early next year.

State Sen. Gloria Romero, D-Rosemead, helped facilitate the deal by essentially dropping her opposition to the garbage-sorting plant [officially known as the Materials Recovery Facility or MRF] that will separate recyclable items from the useless household trash that comes in by trash truck daily. Romero heads the state Senate Select Committee on Urban Landfills.

It's the leftovers that will be loaded into closed rail cars for shipment to a remote desert location, hopefully well before the closure of Puente Hills.

This last landfill in the eastern part of the county is slated to cease operation in 2013. Quite simply, Puente Hills has at last run out of room to bury the county's waste.

The MRF will replace the open dump but will process much less trash. Currently Puente Hills is permitted for about 13,000 tons per day. The MRF will be allowed only 4,000 tons per day. Quite a reduction.

The upside for all residents is that truck traffic on the area's freeways will be greatly reduced as trucks will have to be diverted to other landfills or MRFs. The downside is that the region will have to endure nine more years of conceivably increased trash tonnage and dump/MRF traffic.

But at last there is an end in site.

At one time, the area was home to five dumps, most within five miles of each other. They included Spadra in Pomona, Browning Ferris' Azusa Landfill in that city [a clear threat to the area's groundwater] and the infamous BKK Corp. toxic waste/household waste site in West Covina. Another privately owned facility remains in Whittier along with the county's Puente Hills Landfill that backs up to the Whittier Hills.

So it's past time to bring relief to the region by shipping waste to a remote desert landfill site in Imperial County owned by the Sanitation District, a solution close to 50 percent of San Gabriel Valley residents support even if it meant higher trash bills, according to a June 2000 Rose Institute survey. But the most exciting part of this week's historic understanding is that it makes closure of urban landfills a possibility.

Already, mandated curbside recycling is taking place throughout much of the state, diverting up to 50 percent

of the trash stream to those holes in the ground, no longer compatible with the residential neighborhoods that ring them. MRFs can further reduce the flow.

The Sanitation Districts already have several such facilities in operation including one in Downey. City of Industry also has a MRF. More SoCal cities should get involved with enclosed sorting sites, because it's also time each community become responsible for dealing with more of the trash produced by its residents.

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