

Reducing Waste Through Behavior

Project 1: Bulky Waste Salvage, Recycling, and Disposal

Background: Illegal dumping is a common problem in parts of San Rafael. Abandoned mattresses, furniture, and other bulky waste often spur additional criminal activity and threaten public health. The Canal neighborhood bears the brunt of the problem, with its mixture of commercial businesses, multifamily dwellings, and single-family homes.

Action: As part of a yearlong pilot project, I organized monthly disposal and recycling events for residents to drop off old mattresses and furniture for free.

Goal: To better understand the barriers that prevent people from properly disposing of unwanted bulky waste and to minimize the materials sent to landfill.



A Canal resident drops off an old mattress and sofa at our recycling and disposal event on March 23, 2019.



Alex at the Farmers' Market encouraging a customer to participate in our pilot project reusable containers.

Project 2: Commercial Waste Management and Compliance

Background: California Assembly Bill (AB) 1826 became law in 2014 and mandates that commercial businesses implement programs for organics recycling. This includes everything from food scraps, to wooden pallets, to landscape trimmings. The threshold to comply with this law has tightened each year since 2014 and many businesses have struggled to keep up.

Action: With input from CalRecycle and Marin Sanitary Service, I updated and began implementing San Rafael's compliance and engagement plan for this law.

Goal: To identify the barriers that inhibit compliance, to launch new initiatives, and to provide resources for businesses to implement effective programs for organics recycling.

Project Results

Project 1

- Collected 294 mattresses for recycling.
- Interviewed more than 200 residents about bulky waste disposal.

- Collected nearly 400 cubic yards of bulky waste for salvage and disposal.
- Collected 842 pounds of electronic waste for recycling.

Project 2

- Organized 1 reusable mug campaign at Dominican University with local coffee companies.
- Drafted 1 policy recommendation for organics recycling at San Rafael's Community Center.

- Published 2 articles about best practices for commercial organics recycling.
- Launched 1 pilot project for reusable containers at a local Farmers' Market.

Lessons Learned

Collect and analyze baseline data before starting a new project.

Without a clear understanding of existing conditions, it's difficult to implement an effective program and measure your impact. Select key metrics at the start of the project to guide your efforts.

Avoid jumping to solutions when launching a new behavior change campaign.

Identifying the community-specific barriers that prevent people from engaging in certain behavior is an essential first step. You must also pinpoint the benefits of behavior change and develop a compelling value proposition to encourage participation in your campaign.

