

Eco-tip: Options slim for treated wood disposal, solutions needed from state

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NEWS

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Sometimes, even the leader of an environmental organization opposes regulations making disposal too difficult.

This week, Doug Kobold, executive director of the California Product Stewardship Council, told me why his organization supported the issuance of variances allowing some landfills to continue accepting treated wood waste. The council is at the forefront of legislative efforts to protect the environment by holding retailers and manufacturers responsible for the environmental costs of their products.

He said the landfill is the best place for treated wood waste.

“And if you make it too difficult to dispose, you end up with treated wood dumped on the sides of the roads or illegally burned,” Kobold said.

Previous regulations allowing treated wood waste to be handled with alternative management standards expired at the end of last year.

Without these alternative standards, hazardous treated wood waste managed in California had to be stored and manifested as hazardous waste and transported to a landfill that can handle this type of specialized waste. There is only one such landfill in the state that could accept the materials.

As the deadline for the expiration of the alternative management standards approached without a legislative or regulatory solution, contractors began rejecting jobs expected to generate treated wood waste, and industrial generators prepared to stockpile.

Projected costs for managing treated wood rose from around \$80 per ton to what Kobold estimated would be around \$500 per ton for transport and authorized disposal.

Addressing the problem, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, with existing legislative authority and following strict rules, issued new variances, a system that had not been used since before 2008.

Locally, Toland Road Landfill did not obtain a variance, so treated wood waste is not allowed for disposal there, but the Simi Valley Landfill did obtain a variance and now charges \$83.50 per ton to accept treated wood from Ventura County and \$87.50 to accept it from outside Ventura County.

Waste Management, which operates the Simi Valley Landfill, will accept only pre-approved loads of treated lumber, so customers must make arrangements prior to delivery, by calling 805-579-7267 or obtaining pre-approval of the load online at www.wmsolutions.com.

Variances are valid for six months and can be renewed only once, so generators and landfills are depending on legislation for a longer-term solution. Such legislation including Assembly Bill 332, is expected to arrive on the governor's desk for final approval within the next few weeks.

For other materials, high disposal costs are sometimes seen by recyclers as beneficial, since cheap disposal can be a disincentive to reuse or recycling. However, this is not the case with treated wood because reuse is limited and recycling is not viable.

Pressure treatment forces chemical preservatives into the cellular structure of wood. These chemicals are undesirable in mulch or compost, so if your scrap lumber is lined with tiny holes or stained green, these indicators of pressure treatment should prevent you from placing the wrong types of wood in your local curbside yard waste cart.

Reuse of pressure-treated wood is also problematic. Cutting and sanding require precautions to avoid breathing the sawdust, which is considered toxic by the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, although some home improvement websites say a dust mask,

safety goggle and a shower afterward are adequate to ensure safety.

Municipally sponsored household hazardous waste collection events are also an alternative for disposal of treated wood waste, and to homeowners, such events may look like a no-cost option. However, using these events is actually the most expensive way to handle the material, and the cost is placed on refuse rate payers whose fees pay for these programs.

According to Don Sheppard, who manages Ventura County's Pollution Prevention Center, located between Ojai and Ventura, household hazardous waste management contractors charge over \$60 for each vehicle arriving at the event.

They would charge their cost plus 20% to accept treated wood, package it, haul it to an authorized site and pay the fee for the site to accept the material. The center received no treated wood during the past year, according to Sheppard.

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