



#### CITY COUNCIL 2024

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SHARON RANALS, CITY MANAGER

September 12, 2024

Hon. Amarra A. Lee  
Judge of the Superior Court  
c/o Bianca Fasuescu  
Hall of Justice  
400 County Center; 2nd Floor  
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

**Subject: Response to 2023-2024 Grand Jury July 11, 2024 report, “The State of Compost Compliance in San Mateo County”**

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the Grand Jury's findings. This letter serves as the official response from the City of South San Francisco to the findings and recommendations outlined in the report. Please be advised that this response was approved by the South San Francisco City Council during its meeting on September 11, 2024.

#### **FINDINGS**

**F1.** High green cart enrollment costs and insufficient bin space are the dominant contributors to low participation rates among multi-family dwellings and businesses.

**Response to F1** - The City disagrees with this Finding. The City and SSF Scavenger work with multi-family dwellings and businesses on waste analysis to determine reduced size of grey cart for landfill if green bin is added, therefore reducing the cost and ensuring compliance with SB 1383 requirements. Regarding insufficient cart space, there is an option to waive green cart enrollment with a Physical Space Waiver for accounts that demonstrate that the premises lacks adequate space for the collection containers; the City of South San Francisco has issued 20 Physical Space waivers.

**F2.** Green bin contamination among compliant multi-family dwellings and businesses prevents them from diverting more organic waste.

**Response to F2** - The City agrees with this Finding; correct sorting at the source does maximize diversion. If there is significant contamination, the cart/bin is tagged and not serviced, which encourages re-sorting at the source. In the case of minimal contamination, our hauler's de-packaging system can assist in extracting organic materials.

**F3.** City, County, and RethinkWaste compliance outreach efforts for multi-family dwellings and businesses could improve because a significant portion of these properties remain non-compliant.

**Response to F3** - The City agrees with this Finding. Extensive outreach (such as phone calls, multi-lingual letters, site visits, instructional signs, tote bags, kitchen pails, recycling guides, newsletters, social media campaigns and in-person training sessions) has previously been conducted and is ongoing. The City can increase enforcement at this point.

**F4.** Multi-family dwellings and businesses produce a significant amount of the County's organic waste.

**Response to F4** - The City agrees with this Finding.

**F5.** Citizens cannot conveniently access reliable diversion and participation rates because JPAs and cities do not make the information available on their government websites.

**Response to F5** - The City agrees with this Finding. As far as staff are aware, there is no requirement from CalRecycle for jurisdictions to provide this information; we are awaiting confirmation from their staff. CalRecycle's website provides jurisdictional data including diversion rates. If the City had received requests for diversion and participation rates by citizens, the City would have provided the data to them. We will make data available on City website per R4 below.

**F6.** Assessing progress on organic waste diversion in Atherton, Brisbane, Millbrae, Pacifica, San Bruno, South San Francisco, and Woodside is difficult because they and their haulers do not separate waste tons by property type on their annual or quarterly reports.

**Response to F6** - The City partially disagrees with this Finding. Progress can be assessed in different ways. As far as we are aware, CalRecycle does not require reporting by property type; we are awaiting confirmation from their staff. The hauler tracks progress using lid flipping to monitor contamination levels, participation rates across the entire customer base, and overall diversion by tonnage across all waste streams.

**F7.** An alternate and reliable method to separating waste tons by property type would be analyzing contamination statistics from route audits and waste evaluations.

**Response to F7** - The City agrees with this Finding. Lid flipping has been the primary way to identify contamination. Our hauler is currently sampling organic waste streams for contamination, and they follow up with any generators that have contamination.

**F8.** Brisbane, South San Francisco, and Millbrae cannot properly track their waste trends since their hauler and contractor have contradictory diversion rate formulas and tonnage measurements.

**Response to F8** - The City disagrees with this Finding. The methodology of calculating diversion rate as reported in the EAR (Electronic Annual Report) is as required by the State of California and has been used consistently so trends over time can be observed. The tonnage the

hauler collects and diverts feeds into the jurisdiction diversion rate calculated in the EAR. Since the Grand Jury used a completely different formula, it is to be expected that they would have a different result.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1.** Beginning March 1, 2025, cities, the County, and RethinkWaste should host regular inperson green cart enrollment summits for non-compliant businesses and multi-family dwellings, and identify other new compliance strategies.

**Response to R1** - The recommendation will not be implemented. The hauler already goes directly to the generators site to make hands-on recommendations and provide education.

**R2.** Beginning January 1, 2025, Brisbane, South San Francisco, and Millbrae should investigate their Electronic Annual Report contractor's diversion rate conversion formulas and their hauler's waste scales.

**Response to R2** - The recommendation has been implemented. It has been verified that the haulers scales are accurate.

**R3.** By July 1, 2025, Brisbane, South San Francisco, and Millbrae should begin using the simpler diversion rate calculation the report mentioned or develop a contingency plan if their hauler's scales are inaccurate.

**Response to R3** - The recommendation has been implemented. It has been verified that the haulers scales are accurate.

**R4.** Beginning November 30, 2024, cities should publish quarterly or annual waste reports with diversion and participation rates on their government websites.

**Response to R4** - The recommendation will be implemented. The City will post annual diversion and participation rates from our Electronic Annual Report required by CalRecycle on the City's website by November 30 each year.

**R5.** Beginning December 31, 2024, cities should separate waste tons and diversion rates into the three (or two) property types (business, residential, multi-family) in their annual or quarterly reports.

**Response to R5** - The recommendation will not be implemented. All waste generators that are non-compliant or contaminate waste streams are targeted individually. If data was to be split into categories there is a significant grey area in making the determination between commercial vs. multifamily vs. residential. For example, mixed-use properties with retail on the ground floor and housing above.

**R6.** Starting April 1, 2025, cities that cannot separate waste tons and diversion rates by property type should conduct waste evaluations on highly contaminated routes more often.

**Response to R6** - The recommendation has been implemented. The hauler conducts waste reviews and revisits problem addresses. The hauler has found commercial front load bins for organics and recycling to be most problematic and therefore has focused on this type.

**R7.** Starting May 1, 2025, cities that cannot separate waste tons and diversion rates by property type should analyze problematic routes' past and present contamination trends to track their progress.

**Response to R7** - This recommendation has yet to be implemented but will be implemented in the future. The City will work with its hauler to analyze problematic routes' past and present contamination trends to track their progress starting May 1, 2025 or earlier.

**R8.** By February 1, 2025, jurisdictions should develop and implement new ways to make green bins usable in multi-family dwellings' and businesses' narrow or small waste enclosures.

**Response to R8** - This recommendation has been implemented. The hauler provides various sized bins for organic waste, including various sized carts (32gal - 96gal) and front-end load style (1yd - 4yd). For multi-family dwellings, the City and hauler also provide small kitchen pails to help with transport of organic waste to make the green bins more usable.

Please reach me at (650) 877-8502 if there are any questions regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Sharon K. Ranals  
City Manager

Cc: Grand Jury email (sent via email to [grandjury@sanmateocourt.org](mailto:grandjury@sanmateocourt.org))

South San Francisco City Clerk