

CALIFORNIA ORGANICS BAN ASSISTANCE

Legislation Overview: As part of its efforts to address climate change, the state of California is requiring certain businesses to divert organic material (such as food scraps, food-soiled paper, and yard trimmings) from the landfill, where they would rot and emit greenhouse gases.

Businesses subject to this law must recycle organics via composting (to create healthy soil) or anaerobic digestion (to generate energy).

1. How do I know if this law applies to me?

The state has tools to help you determine if you must comply:

<http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/recycle/commercial/organics/Business.htm>

Examples of organizations that may generate 8 cubic yards of organics per week and need to comply by April 1, 2016:

- Sports venues and performing art venues employing 74 or more people
- Hotels & conference centers employing 140 or more people

Examples of organizations that may generate 4 cubic yards of organics per week and need to comply by January 1, 2017:

- Restaurants with 51 employees or more
- Hospitals employing 287 employees or more

2. What does this mean for foodservice operators who are covered by the law? And how does packaging fit in?

Foodservice operators who generate more organics than the specified threshold must keep food scraps, yard trimmings, and food soiled paper out of landfills. This means these materials must be collected separately or sorted out of the trash. It also requires finding a company to take the materials to a commercial composter or anaerobic digester.

For operations with a public-facing component, asking the public to put food scraps in its own separate bin is an uphill battle. Many people simply put everything in one bin and don't take the time to read bin signage. If you use conventional packaging, it is very likely that non-compostable plastic cups and cutlery will end up with the food. Most composters have a limit on the level of "contamination" they will accept because it won't break down, is expensive to remove, and decreases the value of the finished compost. No one wants bits of plastic in their garden soil.

This is where compostable packaging can help. It allows people to put

California AB 1826

The following businesses must source separate and recycle organic material:

4/1/2016: Businesses that generate 8+ cubic yards of organic materials/week

1/1/2017: Businesses that generate 4+ cubic yards of organic materials/week

1/1/2019: Businesses that generate 4+ cubic yards of commercial solid waste

1/1/2020: If ban hasn't reduced disposal of organic waste by 50% below 2014 levels, businesses that generate 2+ cubic yards of commercial solid waste/week

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their half uneaten sandwich in the same bin as the compostable plate because this type of packaging will break down into healthy nutrients for soil. This makes things much easier for the foodservice operator. While a sort to remove non-compostable contamination may still be necessary, shifting to all compostable packaging significantly reduces the foodservice operator's efforts to compost their organics.

3. I'm required to comply with this new law. What do I do to get started?

a. Sign up for composting service. The best place to start is the company that is picking up your landfill and recyclable materials. They may offer hauling services for composting as well.

If they do not, you may reach out to commercial composters directly and ask if they haul. If they do not, they may be able to connect you to haulers in your area who would pick up your organics. Many counties have a list of haulers that service the area on the county website.

b. Switch to compostable packaging. As explained, this will make composting food scraps much easier. It is important to try to get as close as possible to using only compostables for your packaging. Any items that must be separated present an opportunity for contamination.

The first step is understanding all of your packaging needs, then reaching out to your distributor or provider of packaging to see which compostable items they offer.

c. Obtain new bins and signs. Once you've secured composting services and have switched to compostable packaging, you will need to provide bins for collecting organic materials. Be sure to think through front-of-house and back-of-house collection areas. In front-of-house, make sure you offer an organics bin in every location you provide landfill and recycling bins. People like to dispose of all materials in one place.

Signage is key – for both your customers and your staff. Be sure to include photos or images of the actual products you use. For example, don't just show a picture of a generic compostable cup. Show a picture of your compostable cup.

d. Educate your staff. Employees play a very important role in successful composting programs. They need to understand the proper destination for all materials generated at your operation. This includes understanding where to empty bins in back-of-house collection areas or large containers outside. Depending on the level of contamination allowed by your compost facility, employees may need to go through organics to remove non-compostable items. Employees can also help educate customers as they interact them. Provide training on composting when you launch the program, as well as on an on-going basis.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact Eco-Products' Sustainability Maven at sustainabilitymaven@ecoproducts.com.