

Santa Rosa recycling center shuttered by regulators gets \$8 million upgrade



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The North Bay's largest garbage hauler this week showed off upgrades to its Santa Rosa recycling center that the company hopes will convince regulators to sign off on needed permits.

The Ratto Group has spent eight months re-engineering its Standish Avenue facility, which health inspectors ordered closed over excessive garbage levels.

The company expects the work will help it secure a required state solid waste permit and assure a pending sale of the company to San Francisco-based Recology.

"Jim Ratto has made a significant investment of \$8 million in an important component of the community infrastructure to achieve its environmental goals," said company spokesman Eric Koenigshofer.

Since the facility shut down, much of Sonoma County's recycling is being hauled to facilities as far away as the Central Valley.

Under a banner that read "The Future of Recycling," company officials gave tours for public officials and the media Wednesday, allowing them to inspect

the new equipment in the refurbished facility. Key upgrades include \$1 million in new asphalt and concrete, which regulators had said was in poor condition, a \$175,000 wastewater containment system, and a \$250,000 drum feeder from the Netherlands that will “fluff up” material as it enters the sorting line and make it easier for workers to separate out recyclable material, Koenigshofer said.

Other upgrades include an improved glass separator, a new device that uses electromagnetic current to separate metals from the waste stream, and a network of overhead metal ducts through which aluminum and paper are blown into piles and later bailed.

New steel support beams were also installed to replace the ones that had become bent from trucks colliding with them over the years. New lighting and pest control measures also were added, Koenigshofer said.

Inspections are underway, and if all goes well, CalRecycle should grant the company a solid waste permit at its Aug. 15 meeting, said Scott Alonso, spokesman for the Sonoma County Department of Health Services.

“They’ve followed the entire process, so everything looks good,” Alonso said.

The company operated for years outside of state laws that require recycling centers to keep non-recyclable material below 10 percent.

Following a complaint, inspections performed in 2015 showed garbage levels over 20 percent, which the company said is a consequence of people placing non-recyclable material in blue bins.

The timing of the work is important because the company operates two facilities on Standish Avenue, on Santa Rosa’s southwestern outskirts. The main one on the west side of the road, now refurbished, has been shut down since December. The one on the east side, where recycling operations continue, is due to shut down Aug. 15 under the company’s February agreement with the county. Before that, the company had been operating for months despite a cease and desist order, for which it paid hundreds of thousands in fines.

When the renovated facility reopens, it will be able to handle up to 500 tons of material per day, or all of the recycling from the eight Sonoma County cities and county areas Ratto serves, Koenigshofer said.

Eric Potashner, vice president at Recology, attended the event and approved of the upgrades to a facility his company soon expects to own.

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