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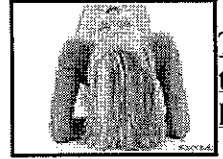
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### Garbage-to-energy? California has second thoughts

September 6, 2010 | 2:08 pm



Government officials from around the world used to come to Long Beach, Southern California's industrial port city, to catch a glimpse of the future: Two-story piles of trash would disappear into a furnace and eventually be transformed into electricity to power thousands of homes.

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Nowadays, it's U.S. officials going to Canada, Japan and parts of Western Europe to see the latest advances.

The Long Beach plant, for all its promise when it began operations roughly 20 years ago, still churns out megawatts. But it is a relic, a symbol of how California, one of America's greenest states, fell behind other countries in the development of trash-to-energy technology.

"I am having a hard time explaining why California is so far behind," said Eugene Tseng Tseng, a UCLA law professor who spent the last three months leading delegations on overseas tours.

While so-called biorefineries have blossomed abroad, concerns that the technique would undermine recycling efforts and worsen air pollution stalled efforts in California. With space for garbage dumps dwindling, proponents of a new breed of the technology hope to win over detractors.

Los Angeles County officials want to build three plants at a total cost of \$200 million to demonstrate how far the technology has come as they scramble for alternatives to closing the world's largest landfill and shipping trash four hours by rail to an abandoned gold mine near the Mexican border.

If they prove successful at reducing waste and producing power, there's no guarantee they'll usher in a new wave of garbage-gobbling technology. Efforts to pass legislation that would have given waste-to-energy plants credit toward recycling and renewable energy goals so that cities could meet state mandates hit a snag this year when some environmentalists argued that such facilities are no different from incinerators, which do not receive credits.

"We have the most aggressive goals for recycling and renewable energies but we've also got groups fighting us on solar, wind and now this," said Coby Skye with the county's Environmental Programs Division. "There are no other options if we can't get these technologies moving forward."

Part of the reason that Europe and Asia are now ahead of the United States on such technology is that they had to grapple with the lack of dump space years earlier. Many are also signatories to the Kyoto Protocol and must reduce greenhouse gases that are produced as waste decomposes in landfills.

The county plan, which still needs financing and permitting, is to build three demonstration plants in Riverside and Orange counties. They would either use heat to turn trash to energy or use microorganisms, which would eat organic material and create methane to produce power. The byproduct can also be used as compost.

Each plant would be a little smaller than a typical biorefinery and would convert as much as 300 tons of trash per day, accepting trash from all over. Los Angeles County alone produces about 33,000 tons of garbage a day.

The plant in Long Beach, which was completed in 1988, consumes about 1,550 tons of trash per day. Unrecyclable garbage is fed into a furnace and the steam generated from burning the trash is used to drive a turbine generator, producing enough electricity to power 35,000 homes. The resulting ash is also used to pave roads at the county's dump.

Scott Smithline with Californians Against Waste, an opposition group, said he has toured such facilities around the world. To build a clean-burning plant in an area synonymous with smog, he said, garbage costs would soar. He also fears that efforts to increase the mandate that cities recycle half of their garbage will fail if communities have contracted to send that waste to a biorefinery.

"What Californians care about is, 'Is the air going to be clean?'" he said. "What I don't want to see is this done on the cheap." Critics call the technology experimental and say building such refineries would be a step back to the 1970s and '80s, when incinerators were a top producer of toxic air

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But Bill Welch, an emissions expert at UC Riverside said new biorefineries produce about the same amount of pollution as refineries, chemical plants, dry cleaners and auto body shops. "Incinerators got a horrible reputation and deservedly so, but since then, the air pollution technology is so sophisticated," said Welch, who was contracted by the Bioenergy Producers Assn. to study facilities around the world.

"As an environmental scientist, I think the biggest threat we face is global warming. That's going to make many more people sick than any of the emissions from these plants will," he said.

Striking a balance between fresh air and fewer greenhouse gases remains a challenge, and has some environmentalists saying it's time to look at alternatives. "The current situation with our trash, both because of our over-consumption and over-reliance on landfills, is not sustainable," said Martin Schlageter, who heads the Coalition for Clean Air. "All options have to be on the table."

The Navy has partnered with UCLA to study biorefineries in an effort to meet a national renewable energy plan that includes half of the agency's energy usage coming from alternative sources by 2020. Leslie L. McLaughlin, the solid waste program manager for the Navy Region Southwest in San Diego, said she wants to make sure they proceed carefully. "My focus on this is to make sure we don't create one environmental problem by trying to solve another," she said.

-- Associated Press

*Photo: A truck driver, left, unloads solid waste operator at the South East Reserve Recovery Facility (SERRF) in Long Beach, Calif. Twenty five years ago California was at the forefront of the trash-to-energy conversion technology but now lags other U.S. states and foreign nations. Credit: Damian Dovarganes / Associated Press*



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Edmund G. Brown Jr.

## News Release

August 25, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: (510) 622-4500

### **Brown Files Charges Against Sham Electronic Waste Recyclers**

SAN JOSE - Attorney General Edmund G. Brown Jr. today announced criminal charges against the owner and two managers of San Jose-based electronic waste recycler Tung Tai Group, after the company submitted \$1 million in "fraudulent and fictitious" reimbursement claims for more than 2 million pounds of electronic waste that they never recycled.

"Tung Tai Group attempted to collect \$1 million in fraudulent and fictitious state reimbursements for millions of pounds of electronic waste that didn't exist," Brown said. "This brazen scheme is a violation of state law and the public trust."

Two managers, John Chen, 38, of Hillsborough, and Jason Huang, 65, of Foster City, were arrested last week and posted bail, set at \$1 million each. The owner, Joseph Chen, 69, of Hillsborough, is in China and arrangements are being made for him to return to the U.S. to be arraigned on the charges.

Together, the men face 17 criminal counts for submitting false documents, attempting to defraud the state, forgery and hazardous waste storage and handling violations. If convicted, the men face a maximum of nine years in prison.

"These arrests show that this department is committed to keeping e-waste out of our landfills and to rooting out those who would defraud our system for private financial gain," said Maziar Movassaghi, acting director of the Department of Toxic Substances Control.

Electronic waste recyclers break down televisions, computer monitors, laptop computers and other waste collected from California businesses and households. Recyclers break the waste into various recyclable parts and submit a claim for reimbursement to the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle). On average, CalRecycle pays 39 cents per pound of material recycled.

In late 2008, CalRecycle auditors contacted investigators at the Department of Toxic Substances Control after noticing discrepancies in the claims submitted by Tung Tai and the records kept by Golden State Records and Recycling, a company that collected and transferred materials to Tung Tai.

In July 2009, agents searched the Tung Tai facility and discovered two separate sets of records, which provided evidence that the company submitted claims to CalRecycle between January and September 2008 that grossly inflated the amount of pounds of recycled material eligible for reimbursement.

For example, one set of records showed that a collector delivered 62,000 pounds of material to Tung Tai, but forms submitted to CalRecycle for reimbursement listed nearly 555,000 pounds. This deception increased the amount Tung Tai sought from the state by more than \$235,000.

In addition, Tung Tai submitted records to CalRecycle listing items that were never delivered to Tung Tai by any approved collector of electronic waste.

The state did not make payments on the falsified and inflated requests for reimbursement, which totaled \$1 million.

These charges underscore Brown's commitment to prosecuting fraud against state agencies. In May, Brown shut down three recycling fraud rings that smuggled cans and bottles worth more than \$3.5 million in recycling fees into California.

John Chen and Huang are being arraigned at the San Jose Courthouse on September 9.

A copy of the complaint, which was filed in Santa Clara Superior Court, is attached.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Lawmakers to introduce new e-waste export legislation

Sept. 30 -- Two U.S. lawmakers are set to introduce new e-waste legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, according to the Electronics TakeBack Coalition.

The coalition said U.S. Reps. Gene Green and Mike Thompson are introducing a new e-waste export bill -- the Responsible Electronics Recycling Act of 2010 -- to promote electronics recycling and stop global dumping of e-waste generated in the U.S.

The coalition said the bill adds a new section to the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act laws establishing a new category of "restricted electronic waste" which cannot be exported from the U.S. to developing nations. Non-hazardous or tested and working electronic products or parts are not restricted.

For more information on the coalition, [click here](#).

Contact Waste & Recycling News reporter Amanda Smith-Teutsch at 330-865-6166 or [asmith-teutsch@crain.com](mailto:asmith-teutsch@crain.com)

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Lowe's installs recycling centers in U.S. stores

Sept. 28 -- Home improvement retailer Lowe's Companies Inc. said today it has installed recycling centers in nearly 1,700 U.S. stores to provide a one-stop recycling destination for customers.

In addition to recycling shipping materials such as pallets, wraps and cardboard, Lowe's stores are now offering to recycle hard-to-handle products like mobile phones, batteries and CFL bulbs.

"Lowe's is always looking for new and better ways to serve our customers and continue to be responsible stewards of the environment," said Michael Chenard, Lowe's director of environmental affairs. "Recycling is a simple way to help reduce unnecessary waste in our communities. The recycling centers make it easier for customers to make a difference, and we look forward to continuing to partner with them to promote and support community recycling."

Call2Recycle will handle phones and batteries collected through the recycling centers. The recycling centers will be provided at 1,700 U.S. retail locations.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Company creates new rewards-for-recycling program

Sept. 27 -- A new rewards-for-recycling program has been launched, offering music downloads, discounts on new technologies and donations to schools and non-profits in exchange for old electronics.

The new program is available through MaxBack.com, and was created by Environmental Reclamation Services of Erie, Pa., and its sister company Funding Factory, which created a fundraising-through-recycling program for schools and nonprofits in 1998.

"According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, Americans own nearly 3 billion consumer electronic devices so it's important for us to reuse, recycle," said Sean Michaels, Co-President. "It's our hope that MaxBack.com provides incentive for teens, tweens, and really anyone to trade in their old stuff for new items or to share with a non-profit organization."

The company said more than 50,000 organizations have taken advantage of Funding Factory's many incentives, diverting more than 26 million printer cartridges from U.S. landfills.

The company does not recycle all of the materials in house. The company refurbishes and recycles ink cartridges in its Erie facility. Cell phones are sold to refurbishers for reuse and recycling, while batteries, metals, chargers and cords are also sent to accredited recyclers, the company said. The company is committed to recycling in a "responsible manner," according to an environmental policy statement on the ERS website.

For more information, visit [MaxBack.com](http://MaxBack.com).

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## 'Toy Story 3' landfill named one of 2010's hottest toys

Sept. 21 -- Landfills have hit the big time with the toddler crowd.

Toys "R" Us is out with its much-talked-about annual list of hottest toys for the holiday season, and there's finally something for the landfill-loving youngster.

Move over G.I. Joe. A play set based on the climax of "Toy Story 3" -- where the famous toys are almost incinerated -- is being called one of the best new toys of the upcoming holiday season.

The "Tri-County Landfill" play set from Fisher-Price is an exclusive to Toys "R" Us. "Just like the movie, the toys can be picked up in a giant scoop and then dropped into a sorter before landing on a conveyor belt that leads to an incinerator," a description released by the toy company states.

Check it out at [www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=10&e=product&pid=54383](http://www.fisher-price.com/fp.aspx?st=10&e=product&pid=54383).

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Fatalities decline among solid waste, recycling workers

Aug. 25 -- Fatal injuries among solid waste and recycling workers "declined substantially" last year compared to 2008, according to the National Solid Wastes Management Association.

The trade group, citing recently released statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, said the fatality rate for solid waste collection workers -- including both refuse and recyclable material collectors -- totaled 19 in 2009, a decrease of 39% from the 31 fatalities registered in 2008.

Total fatalities for all waste management and remediation service employees -- including collection, landfill workers and other jobs -- fell from 74 to 43 from 2008 to 2009, the NSWMA said. That's a 42% decrease.

"We are very pleased that the solid waste industry reduced the number of workplace fatalities in 2009. According to NSWMA data, the leading cause of waste collection worker fatality is being struck by another vehicle, and we will continue to work with members, regulators and others to educate the public about this hazard," NSWMA Safety Director David Biderman said.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## **Biomass proposal would be too burdensome, NSWMA says**

Sept. 17 -- National waste industry officials recently told the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that greenhouse gases produced from biomass should not be regulated in the same manner as emissions created from fossil fuel use.

The National Solid Waste Management Association, a trade group, submitted comments to the EPA regarding how greenhouse gases should be treated under the Prevention of Significant Deterioration and Title V Greenhouse Gas Tailoring Rule.

"NSWMA believes that if the tailoring rule includes the carbon dioxide produced by biomass, it will overly burden local government and private entities that have invested resources into the development of renewable energy and organics management infrastructure," NSWMA President Bruce Parker said.

The NSWMA represents solid waste companies working in the private sector.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Survey shows Texas residents unhappy with bag ban

Aug. 26 -- A survey published by the American Chemistry Council shows residents in a Texas community are opposed to a recently enacted ban on plastic bags in retail stores.

The city commission of Brownsville, Texas, passed a ban on single use plastic bags in January.

The American Chemistry Council said 300 Brownsville adults were surveyed, and said 51% of those questioned wanted to see the bag ban repealed or postponed, and 28% supported it. The remainder was undecided.

The survey also showed that while most of the residents were aware of the upcoming ban, which goes into effect in 2011, nearly all of them reported reusing the plastic bags at home for other uses.

"This survey demonstrates that the City Commission is out of step with Brownsville voters," said Rudy Underwood of the American Chemistry Council, the organization that sponsored the survey. "The citizens of Brownsville clearly oppose banning this valued product that most people rely on and then reuse in their homes."

The survey, conducted Aug. 19-21, carried a 5% margin of error, the ACC said.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## 2 recycling websites join to expand location offerings

Aug. 19 – Two online recycling websites have teamed up to increase their recycling location offerings for consumers.

The agreement was announced between 1-800-Recycling.com and GenGreenLife.com.

The two organizations have agreed to pool their resources and exchange recycling location listings from their respective databases.

Via its mobile App, online resource and phone service, 1-800-Recycling provides information about recycling services and facilities, searchable by city or ZIP code. GenGreen maintains a database of accredited green businesses and organizations in North America, with a growing group of almost 75,000 companies currently in their system.

As part of the agreement, 1-800-Recycling.com will now also be recommending GenGreen approved recyclers as responsible locations for the deposit of recycling materials.

For more information visit <http://1800recycling.com> and [www.GenGreenLife.com](http://www.GenGreenLife.com).

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## New York City mayor signs new recycling legislation

Aug. 18 -- New legislation to expand residential recycling in New York City has been signed into law.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed the 11 new laws updating the city's 21-year-old recycling laws Monday.

Under the new laws, the department of sanitation will take a full range of plastic containers – not just No. 1 and 2 containers previously collected - to a new Sims Recycling Solutions facility in Brooklyn.

The facility, which will be operational in 2012, is expected to divert 8,000 tons of plastic from the landfills the city uses. Public spaces will host 300 new recycling bins, and all public schools and city agencies will have recycling programs as well.

New programs include annual household hazardous waste collections in each borough, a clothing and textile recycling program, and a trial paint recycling effort.

Other provisions of the new laws aim for diversion, instead of tonnage, goals for recycling, different fine structures for residential properties that don't recycle and periodic waste stream and recycling evaluation studies.

A food waste composting study also has been mandated, along with follow-up waste studies between 2012 and 2024.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Group says EPA should not retroactively impose rules

Aug. 17 -- A trade group representing private solid waste companies in the United States says a proposal by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regarding greenhouse gas reporting would "substantially change the requirements for municipal solid waste landfills."

The National Solid Wastes Management Association said the changes would impose "substantial new data collection requirements mid-reporting year."

"NSWMA's Landfill Institute believes that EPA should not retroactively impose these requirements for reports that are to be submitted in 2010 and, in some cases, provide an opportunity for formal public comment," the association said.

The Landfill Institute, a policy-making group within NSWMA, includes owners and operators of landfills as well as consultants, engineers and attorneys working with landfills.

"While some of EPA's changes appear to provide a more reasoned approach to account for the amount of water that might infiltrate into a landfill, other changes impose substantial new data collection requirements mid-reporting year without the benefit of adequate public comment," said Bruce Parker, NSWMA president and CEO.

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# WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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## Refrigerator recycling program teams up with art exhibit

Aug. 2 -- Old refrigerators have been repurposed as works of art to help promote a Chicago-area appliance efficiency effort.

The art exhibit, "Fine Art Fridges," has been sponsored by ComEd, the local utility provider, in support of its refrigerator recycling program.

Fine Art Fridges depicts themes ranging from Chicago architecture to a celebration of flowers. In one of the pieces, artist VooDoo Larry Grobe has transformed a vintage 1950s Philco fridge into a jazzy "VooDoo Hot Rod." In another, Nicole Beck celebrates wildlife in a mosaic tribute to endangered life in the Gulf of Mexico.

In all, nine of the art fridges will be displayed on Michigan Avenue between Chicago Avenue and Illinois Street through Sept. 15.

The exhibit was created to raise awareness for ComEd's Appliance Recycling Program, which gives \$25 to customers when they recycle old, secondary household refrigerators and freezers. The company said 43,000 older units have been removed since the program's inception.

"Fine Art Fridges is a fresh approach to our ongoing efforts to educate our customers through our Smart Ideas portfolio of options that can help customers save money by becoming more energy efficient," said ComEd's President and COO Anne Pramaggiore. "Many households have an extra working refrigerator or freezer in their basement or garage. What they may not know is that older refrigerator appliances can use up to five times more energy than their energy-efficient equivalents. Continued usage of an older model can result in \$150 per year in extra electricity costs."

For more information on the exhibit or the program, visit [www.comed.com](http://www.comed.com) or [www.comed.com/smartideas](http://www.comed.com/smartideas).

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