

News

Grant to help S.J. dispose of paint, protect environment

It's illegal to throw away, so county aims for easier recycling

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February 22, 2009

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STOCKTON - San Joaquin County residents don't mind getting their hands dirty.

They have a do-it-yourself spirit, and that shows in the estimated 800,000 gallons of unused paint piled up in garages and other storage spaces across the county, said Alison Hudson, a program manager at county Solid Waste Division.

And that's not ordinary clutter. Paint is both flammable and toxic, and it is illegal to just toss it in the garbage, she said.

Residents can drop off unused paint at a county facility, but a new grant now in place will meet them halfway, establishing drop-off points for recycled paints at more locations, such as the stores frequented by these handymen and handywomen.

But the \$400,000 grant is expected to do more than just make life a little easier for people cleaning out their garages. The hope is it can save the county hundreds of thousands of dollars in dealing with unwanted paint and serve as a model to be used across the state.

Paint can harm wildlife and pollute groundwater, and it costs money to keep paint out of landfills. Dealing with paint costs the county about \$425,000 a year, about half its budget for the household hazardous waste program, according to the county. Last year, the county collected 80,000 gallons of unused paint.

That paint can be reused as-is, or it can be recycled, said Kimbra Andrews, management analyst at Solid Waste. Even the oldest latex paint can be used to make concrete, she said. "It all gets recycled one way or another."

A focus of the new grant is recycled paint and how to build a market for it, according to the California Integrated Waste Management Board. Recycled paint is typically mixed with some new paint. Most recycled paints contain more than 50 percent of reprocessed paint, according to the board.

Past grants received by the county have helped develop a standardization system for recycled paint, county Integrated Waste Manager Desi Reno said. A Green Seal Certification provides assurance that recycled paint meets expectations of quality, he said.

The newest grant builds on that, making it easier for residents to get rid of their unwanted paint so it can be either re-used or recycled. More paint being turned in for recycling, in turn, supports the recycled-paint market.

That market, and other measures, could ultimately decrease the cost to local governments as producers take more responsibility for their products, he said. The county's cost dealing with paint over a five-year period is about \$2 million.

San Joaquin County will be the lead agency under this grant, teaming up with San Francisco and Tehama counties, the California Product

Stewardship Council, Visions Paint Recycling, the Product Stewardship Institute and the Green Purchasing Institute.

The three counties in the program run the gamut from rural to densely urban.

Retail outlets in urban centers don't have as much space to hold onto returned paint as do rural retailers, said Kristina Miller, Tehama County solid waste program manager. But rural areas have other challenges. Tehama County doesn't have a large budget, and its 61,000 residents are spread out more thinly than the other two counties, Miller said.

"We want to be on the forefront of change ... not only for our residents, but for the whole state," she said.

About 10 percent of the paint purchased in the country every year goes unused, said Scott Cassel, executive director of the Product Stewardship Institute of Boston.

That's about 64 million gallons a year, and the cost to manage that unused paint is about \$500 million a year, he said.

California, Oregon and Minnesota are at the forefront of change in response to problems with leftover paint, he said. A strong recycled paint market can help reduce that cost. Success requires people using that paint, he said.

The 250,000-square-foot interior of San Joaquin County's new administration building now under construction will be coated in recycled paint, Capital Projects Director Gabe Karam said. Visions Paint won the bid for the project in a competitive bidding process that included bidders using non-recycled paint, he said.

"They stood out, and we're happy we got them," he said.

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