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Environment

Massive energy project could double Tajiguas Landfill's lifespan

$149M project aims to curb greenhouse gasses

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Posted: May 29, 2019 06:25 PM PDT
Updated: May 29, 2019 07:22 PM PDT

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, Calif. - A groundbreaking ceremony at Tajiguas Landfill in Santa Barbara County Wednesday morning served as a symbolic first step toward putting less trash in the ground.

Santa Barbara County officials celebrated the construction of the $149 million renewable energy project, which has the goal of keeping recyclables and organic waste from being buried in the landfill.

Construction on the project, which will feature two main facilities, began in December but rainy weather delayed the groundbreaking ceremony to Wednesday.

“This is a really important project because we’re definitely reducing our dependence on landfilling,” said Carlyle Johnston of Santa Barbara County Public Works Resource Recovery and Waste Management Division.

According to County Public Works, recyclables and organic waste make up roughly 60 percent of the waste buried at Tajiguas Landfill.

The first facility under construction is meant to identify and sort these materials.

Then the organics will be trucked to a second facility up the hill, known as the Anaerobic Digestion Facility. There, they can decompose and the gasses

they emit will be used to power generators and create renewable energy, a cleaner alternative to burying them.

“Organics, once you bury them they have the potential of creating methane,” Johnston said. “And landfills are a common source of methane which is a very potent greenhouse gas and in the future that’s going to eliminate this.”

There will also be a facility to compost organic waster.

Santa Barbara County Public Works says the project will eliminate the equivalent of 29,000 cars’ worth of greenhouse gasses each year.

“The biggest positive impact for our environment of any project in county history,” County Supervisor Das Williams said.

And burying less trash means a longer landfill lifespan.

Tajiguas was originally expected to last only another seven or eight years from now before completely filling up. This project could make it 16 years or more before that happens.

“The most expensive thing, even more expensive than building this project, is the closure costs of the landfill,” Williams said. “The fact is that this is an investment in the future, an investment in avoidance of even more costs.”

The investment that still has a lot of work to go. The facilities are expected to be operating by early 2021, but unfavorable weather could delay construction.