

Community and Technical Considerations for the Lamont PUD Plan B for Wastewater Disposal

Introduction

On behalf of Building Healthy Communities-South Kern, Skeo Solutions and V&A Consulting Engineers conducted an independent, third-party technical review of Plan B with funding from the California Endowment. This fact sheet summarizes the findings and recommendations outlined in the technical review report.

What is Plan B?

The Lamont Public Utility District (Lamont PUD) provides drinking water and wastewater collection and treatment for an area including the communities of Lamont and Weedpatch. Lamont PUD currently sends treated wastewater to the compost facility now owned by Recology for use in composting operations and to irrigate up to 130 acres of non-food crops. Recology leases the land used for crop production and composting operations from Lamont PUD.

In case the composting facility cannot receive the treated wastewater for any reason, the Central Valley Water Quality Control Board is requiring Lamont PUD to have a backup plan, “Plan B” for wastewater disposal. Lamont PUD’s Plan B is to use treated wastewater to irrigate non-food crops on nearby fields owned by Lamont PUD as part of their lease with Lamont PUD. Recology has agreed to restore soils on nearby fields over the next 3-4 years to accept additional wastewater in case the compost facility cannot operate.

How will Plan B affect me and my community?

People of Lamont, Weedpatch and Arvin face some of the greatest environmental and health disparities in the State of California. These burdens leave people highly vulnerable to any additional pollutants, whether in the air, ground, or water. Plan B could contribute to some of these burdens

that the community may want to monitor, including:

- ensuring drinking water is protected from excess pesticides and wastewater contaminants during farming operations;
- minimizing air quality impacts from dust and wastewater vapor during farming and composting operations;
- educating workers and the public on safe handling practices of treated wastewater during storage, irrigation and composting operations.

What happens if Recology ceases operations or breaks the lease with Lamont PUD?

Recology cannot break the lease with Lamont PUD before June 30, 2020. If Recology cannot handle the treated wastewater for more than 60 days, Lamont PUD can take control of the leased property. Currently, Lamont PUD could store treated wastewater for 4 months. Once Plan B is complete Lamont PUD will have 290 acres of land, enough to receive all of the treated wastewater if Recology cannot accept wastewater.

Could the implementation of Plan B by Recology increase sewer rates in Lamont?

The lease agreement between Lamont PUD and Recology states that Recology is responsible for most of the cost and implementation of Plan B, including farming the final 290 acres of land. Residents who are in the Lamont PUD service area should not expect an increase in sewer rates from Plan B.

What alternatives to Plan B were considered?

Lamont PUD considered a range of alternatives for treated wastewater disposal including upgrading the wastewater plant, groundwater recharge, purchase of land or agreements with nearby farmers, and soil restoration for non-food crop production. Lamont PUD's proposed option of improving soil condition of fallow ground is the lowest cost option available. The other alternatives that may improve the wastewater treatment process or would provide for groundwater recharge would be substantially more expensive and therefore could likely require an increase in sewer rates.

Recommendations

The technical review resulted in a set of recommendations to reduce the potential impacts of Plan B on the community and the environment. If implemented in collaboration with the community, these actions could improve community relations and improve overall management of the operations. In addition to these recommendations, Recology and Lamont PUD could identify further actions to reduce impacts and provide benefits to the local community from operations.

Consider certification under the National Biosolids Partnership. Participation in the National Biosolids Partnership could provide technical assistance to help offset Recology's lack of prior experience utilizing biosolids from wastewater plants for composting or agricultural land development.

Minimize potential water quality and quantity related impacts. Minimize pesticide use, manage water resources sustainably and select appropriate irrigation and crop rotation systems.

Minimize air quality impacts. Reduce dust and vapor during farming operations; use best practices and equipment to reduce odor and air emissions; implement an odor complaint system; and train

staff. According to the lease agreement, Recology is to "take all commercially reasonable actions to limit odor emissions from the premises".

Assess and reduce potential climate change impacts. Consider how to adapt operations to increased drought, rising temperatures, and increased air pollution.

Address potential worker health and safety risks. Train staff on safe handling practices of treated wastewater and pesticides.

Engage the community in decisions that affect them. Involve the public in developing plans to reduce pesticides, dust and odor. Provide plain language and multilingual outreach materials. Develop a Community Advisory Group.

Consider opportunities to attain higher wastewater treatment levels. Treating wastewater to a higher standard in the future could increase water resources in a region with water supply concerns. While this option is more expensive, Lamont PUD could benefit in the long-term from sales of water to businesses and farmers, and assure that the water can be used in composting operations. Federal and State funding may also be available to offset costs.

Contact information:

Marcus Griswold, Project Manager, Skeo Solutions,
mgriswold@skeo.com

Ray Yep, Senior Technical Advisor, V&A,
ryep@vaengineering.com

Nicole Kwan, Project Engineer, V&A,
nkwan@vaengineering.com

Funded by the California Endowment on behalf of
Building Healthy Communities-South Kern