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Long Awaited... Compost Production Resumes at Rancho Las Virgenes Composting Facility

Since the Woolsey Fire in 2018, compost production has been temporarily suspended due to damage caused by the fire and the repair work needed to bring it back into production.

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CALABASAS, CA - On Friday, May 29 the Rancho Las Virgenes Composting Facility (Rancho) finally got back to doing what it does best, composting. In November 2018 the Woolsey Fire ripped through the facility, damaging multiple pieces of equipment and buildings. Now, after 18 months of construction, repairs, upgrades and maintenance, Rancho is once again able to turn bio-solids captured at the Tapia Water Reclamation facility into Class A – Exceptional Quality garden compost.

Since the fire, the critical component that needed to be repaired before composting could resume was the facility's partially damaged bio-filter. Responsible for odor mitigation, the bio-filter repairs were delayed as LVMWD staff worked with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Las Virgenes – Triunfo Joint Powers Authority (JPA) insurance carrier throughout the claims process where the JPA was advised that moving forward with repair work prematurely could risk its insurance coverage for damages. In December 2019, the JPA received the first claim checks in the amount of \$1.75 million of the \$6.5 million claimed, signaling that critical repairs could now move forward. Once the bio-filter repairs, requiring the replacement of 2,240 "base plates" and 150 "trench covers" were completed, LVMWD staff could resume the composting process.

Though the bio-filter repair cleared the way for composting to begin, there are still repairs that need to be completed before Rancho can return to normal operations. This damaged equipment is used to add amendment, oftentimes wood chips or sawdust, to the bio-solids to create the compost. In order to resume compost production, LVMWD operators have had to intervene in this process by loading the amendment manually every 25 – 40 minutes.

"This type of frequent operator intervention in what is typically a fully automated process creates operational challenges," LVMWD Compost Operations Supervisor Robert Robins explained "but the Community Compost program is a public service and we hope to have product for our customers in September." Compost production is a multi-faceted operation of processes beyond just the addition of amendment, and when the stringent required testing is accounted for production typically takes around 60 days.

Getting Rancho back up and operating was also a priority as the facility represents key components to the JPA's mission to bring water full circle and close the sustainability loop. By utilizing the captured bio-solids and turning them into compost to be given away to the community Rancho produces a beneficial product.

The production of compost also allows the JPA to forgo traditional means of solids management such as the carbon intensive and costly process of trucking the bio-solids to agricultural areas where they can be land applied or simply dumped into a landfill. Accomplishing the creation of a beneficial product while eliminating waste is integral to being truly sustainable, a key mission of the JPA.

The Community Compost program is one of the most popular and successful JPA outreach programs. Under normal circumstances, compost is available for pick up on Saturdays from 8:00 am until 1:00 pm. Customers provide their own sealable container(s) such as a plastic storage bin with a lid, sturdy plastic bags; or if you're loading a pickup truck or trailer, you must have a cover to secure the load in place. Each individual is responsible for filling their own containers. Customers who are interested in updates as to the status of the JPA Community Compost program are encouraged to register for e-notifications at LVMWD.com/E-Notification.

Be sure to follow us on Facebook, Twitter @lvmwd and Instagram @LasVirgenes_MWD.

Las Virgenes Municipal Water District provides potable water, wastewater treatment, recycled water and biosolids composting to more than 70,000 residents in the cities of Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Hidden Hills, Westlake Village, and unincorporated areas of western Los Angeles County.

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