

ADDRESSING THE CLOSURE OF CHIQUITA CANYON LANDFILL

In 2014, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted the Roadmap to a Sustainable Waste Management Future (Roadmap). In 2022, the Board officially adopted the County’s Zero Waste Plan to meet the County’s waste diversion and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goals. The Zero Waste Plan is focused on eliminating solid and organic waste to ensure that Los Angeles County (County) can reduce its reliance on municipal solid waste landfills. While the County has continued to implement the Zero Waste Plan, the reality of the amount of waste that is generated and must be disposed of at landfills cannot be overlooked.

The County continues to manage solid waste through regulated markets that include large, medium, and small waste haulers, large municipal solid waste landfills, and associated transfer stations. The Chiquita Canyon Landfill (Chiquita Canyon), located in the unincorporated Val Verde community, is one of the largest landfills in the County. The 639-acre site is the second largest active landfill in the County. According to a report prepared by the County’s Department of Public Works, Chiquita Canyon received nearly 34% of the total in-county solid waste disposal in 2023, more than 2.1 million tons. In 2023, Chiquita Canyon had an average daily disposal of more than 7,000 tons.

The ongoing issues at Chiquita Canyon have presented immense challenges and impacts to the communities and residents surrounding the landfill. The Elevated Temperature Landfill (ELTF) incident at Chiquita Canyon has also created difficult operating conditions for the operator. Concerns about the expanding reaction area within the landfill have given pause to local and state regulators who permit the operation of Chiquita Canyon. In September 2024, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Los Angeles Water Board) denied Chiquita Canyon’s application to open up new cells within the site to allow for the continued intake of solid waste.

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Accordingly, the existing cells that are permitted to intake waste have now reached capacity. On December 31, 2024, the operator of Chiquita Canyon notified the County of its intent to close active waste disposal operations effective January 1, 2025. The operator further noted that while they will no longer accept incoming waste, they will continue to manage Chiquita Canyon and continue to implement mitigation measures to address the ELTF incident.

The impending closure of Chiquita Canyon represents a critical juncture in the region's environmental, economic, and social landscape. Its closure could profoundly alter waste management policies, disposal of solid waste in the County, and potential impacts to customers and rate payers whose waste was previously taken to Chiquita Canyon. The magnitude of this issue demands immediate and comprehensive planning to mitigate its far-reaching consequences.

With millions of residents generating substantial amounts of waste daily, the absence of this major landfill places immense pressure on alternative solutions such as recycling, composting, and waste-to-energy facilities. Neighboring facilities like the Sunshine Canyon Landfill, located 15 miles away, already operate near capacity, handling over 2.3 million tons in 2023.

The geographical distribution of waste origin adds another layer of complexity. Chiquita Canyon received 97% of its waste from Los Angeles County jurisdictions, with significant contributions from the Los Angeles Area Integrated Waste Management Authority (L.A.R.A.), Santa Clarita, and Los Angeles County Unincorporated areas, amounting to over 1.4 million tons combined.

Even with combined available daily disposal capacities at the Palmdale, Lancaster, and Simi Valley Landfills, logistical challenges remain significant. These include increased hauling distances and increased greenhouse gas emissions from long haul transport, bottlenecks at transfer stations, and limited capacity at existing landfills, all of which could significantly drive an increase in disposal costs.

Without adequate waste management infrastructure, illegal dumping and improper waste disposal may become more prevalent, leading to increased environmental contamination and health risks. Vulnerable populations, often residing in areas already burdened by environmental inequities, could bear the brunt of these challenges, exacerbating existing disparities.

Most jurisdictions in the County operate Garbage Disposal Districts, along with commercial and residential waste hauling franchises which have contracts between waste haulers and the local jurisdiction. Increased costs of waste disposal are typically allowed to be incorporated on an annual basis to address the rising costs of providing services. The closure of Chiquita Canyon could potentially create significant financial

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impacts to local jurisdictions and ultimately rate payers and residents who contract for these services.

It is imperative that the full impacts of the closure of active operations of Chiquita Canyon be analyzed and an immediate mitigation plan be developed to ensure the continued disposal of solid waste in the County and protections to prevent price spikes, price gouging, and other anti-competitive impacts that would further burden local jurisdictions, and most importantly rate payers with increased costs of service.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS instruct the Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW), in coordination with County Counsel, the Departments of Public Health and Regional Planning and the Local Enforcement Agency (LEA), to report back in writing in 21 days with an analysis of the impacts of the closure of the Chiquita Canyon Landfill to solid waste management in Los Angeles County, including where diverted waste will be transported to, potential impacts at transfer stations, financial impacts for local jurisdictions and ratepayers, along with recommendations for immediate steps to address the potential for increases in illegal dumping that may occur as a result of the closure.

I, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Director of the Department of Public Works, in coordination with County Counsel and the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs, to report back in writing in 30 days with a proposal to implement necessary regulations to address potential price gouging and anti-competitive practices for solid waste disposal in Los Angeles County.

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