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## City's New Organic Digester is a World Winner

Green waste, food scraps, expired milk and ice cream and spoiled fruits and veggies go in, high-quality fertilizer and the cleanest vehicle fuel comes out. The City of Perris has partnered with its waste hauler, CR&R to create the largest organic-waste eating machine in the world, a behemoth so big it will consume 335,000 tons of trash a year and convert it to 260,000 tons of fertilizer and four million gallons of renewable natural gas. All without adding a single atom of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. Work on the \$30-million "anaerobic digester" continues and should be completed by late 2015.

Alex Braicovich, CR&R's senior regional vice president, said that with the completion of the digester, Perris is leading the way to a cleaner planet. The anaerobic digester in City will be the largest in the world and the only one in the U.S. Others have been built in Europe. Braicovich and other CR&R representatives presented an overview of the facility earlier this summer at a City Council meeting.

"This project puts Perris on an environmental map that no one else is on in the whole country," Braicovich said. "Environmentally, the digester is the way to go."

Those words bring a smile to Mayor Daryl Busch and other elected City officials.



Project Manager Mike Silva inspects construction of the world's largest anaerobic digester in Perris, which will convert hundreds of millions of pounds of organic waste each year into fertilizer and fuel to power heavy-duty trucks.

Cutting-edge solutions to environmental challenges are nothing new to the City. In 2007, the City was among the first in California to install solar panels throughout its campus, earning statewide honors from the League of California Cities. The City is working with a non-profit that installs solar collectors on low and moderate-income residences.

Perris officials have installed energy-saving lights throughout the City. To confront the ongoing drought, the City has installed artificial turf along streets, medians and at its new soccer complex, drought-resistant plants at parks, recycled water at the iconic City Hall fountain and "smart" irrigation controllers to reduce wastage.

Busch said supporting the digester maintains Perris' commitment to "think outside the box" to benefit the planet, Southern California and City residents.

"It's something very green—it generates fuel, saves money and makes use of waste that would otherwise go to the dump," Busch said. "We want to thank CR&R for its commitment and for the money it has put into the digester project. We like to think we're leading the way in this area and we want to continue that for our community."

Mayor Pro-Tem Tonya Burke called locating the nation's first anaerobic digester in the City "a sign that Perris is setting the pace as a green City."

"We are on the cutting edge," Burke said. "It's wonderful to be home to this exciting project. Perris is a City that is out in front. That's a nice place to be. Everyone else can follow us—and they will!"



The \$30 million digester works at 130 degrees to convert food waste and other organic materials into fertilizer and fuel.

City Councilwoman Rita Rogers called the relationship between Perris and CR&R an example of a "perfect public-private partnership."

"This is another example of the City of Perris leading the way on the technology needed to create an eco-friendly environment," she said. "We are taking trash and remaking it into fuel and fertilizer. I am pleased that the City continues to set the standard for sustainable living."

Project manager Mike Silva said the digester does its magic in an environment devoid of oxygen, hence the name anaerobic.

Microbes break down green waste and food waste, recalled food products, outdated milk and dairy products, discarded meat products and other organic household trash. CR&R hopes to partner with commercial cafeterias to collect unusable food products to help feed the digester.

Digestion best takes place in a tubular structure at 130 degrees. Refuse is fed continuously into the digester, which takes about 21 days to convert it into a soil-enriching fertilizer that increase water retention, reduces soil erosion and eliminates the need for chemical fertilizers.

"That's when the microbes kick butt," he said.

Once the process begins, the digester operates continuously. Producing renewable natural gas takes about a week longer. Once it emerges, it is mixed with recycled water to filter out carbon dioxide and is then pumped into California's renewable natural gas pipelines. The water will then be used to help irrigate Perris parks and recreation facilities and roadway medians.



Organic waste is ground up before being fed into the Perris digester, which operates continuously to produce fuel and fertilizer.

The CR&R digester took 10 years to go from blueprint to reality. Several City administrators have already toured the facility, including City Manager Richard Belmudez, Assistant City Manager Ron Carr and Director of Development Services Clara Miramontes.

The site also has attracted interested parties from South Korea, Hawaii, Indianan and several communities in California, including Los Angeles and San Jose.

Silva said the visitors, no matter where they arrive from, agree on one thing.

"Everyone sees the value of this technology," he said. "Perris has helped us get there."

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