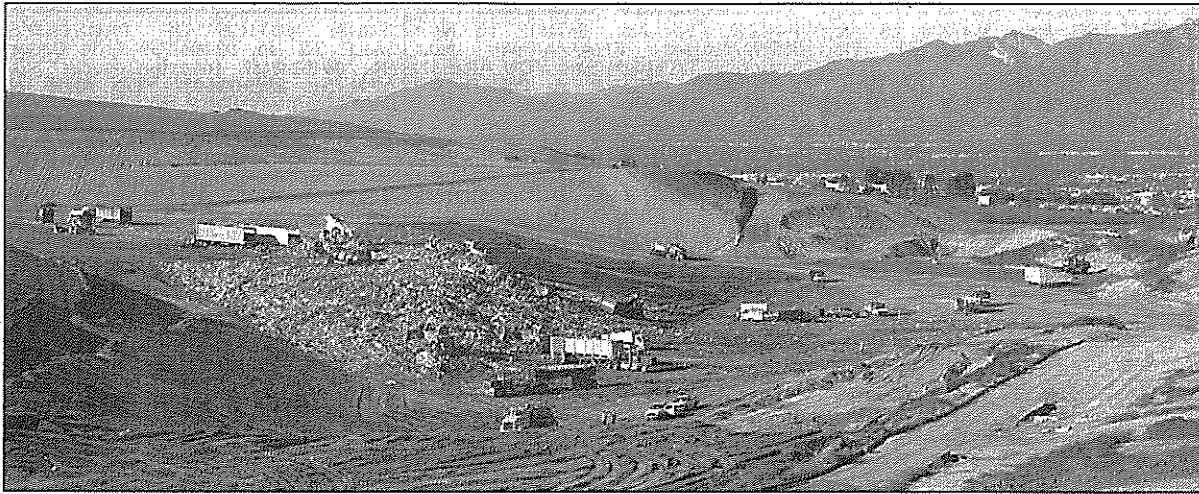


## TRASH FEES TO DOUBLE



Keith Durrflinger/Staff Photographer

Puente Hills Landfill north of Whittier takes up to 12,000 tons of trash per day, but it will close in 2013. Los Angeles County's plan to send trash by rail to Imperial County will cause trash rates to double.

# Landfill closure unavoidable

By Jennifer McLain  
Staff Writer

The San Gabriel Valley once held the undesirable title of "Valley of the Dumps," with nearly a half-dozen landfills covering portions of Industry, West Covina and Monterey Park.

With that title came more pollution, garbage trucks and mounds of trash. It also brought with it cheaper trash rates for residents. Most smaller dumps have closed.

And the area's largest dump, Puente Hills Landfill north of Whittier, closes in five years.

When that closure takes place, trash rates will double because the trash will be sent 200 miles by rail to the desert.

"All trash rates are going to go up, and there is no getting around that," said Sam Pedroza, a Claremont councilman who chairs the San Gabriel Valley Council of Government's solid waste committee and works for the organization that runs the Puente Hills Landfill.

"The cheapest way has been urban landfills, but those are now a thing of the past," he said.

The landfill is owned and operated by Los Angeles County's Sanitation Districts. In preparation for the landfill's closure, the Sanitation Districts invested \$500 million in a waste-by-rail program that will take trash from Industry southeast to Imperial County.

The Mesquite Regional Landfill will be completed by the end of the year, and it is expected to start receiving trash by 2011, just two years before

Puente Hills Landfill is scheduled to close.

Puente Hills Landfill serves nearly 60 cities and accepts up to 12,000 tons of trash daily — nearly a third of all trash produced each day in Los Angeles County, said Janet Coke, waste-by-rail section head for the Sanitation Districts.

Public outcry and space restrictions forced the Sanitation Districts to set their sites on landfills on the outskirts of urban sprawl.

For nearly two decades, the county has worked with San Gabriel Valley leaders in developing a plan, getting permits and finding public support for the \$500 million waste-to-rail project. The project was financed by subsidies paid by ratepayers and by methane gas sales.

San Gabriel Valley leaders have supported the project since its inception. But as the landfill's closure approaches, Sanitation Districts' officials are fearful that those same leaders are going to withdraw their support at the last minute in search of cheaper alternatives.

"Our message to the community is, look, you have supported this all these years, and we need your trash to continue to support it," Coke said. "We know that cities are challenged right now in managing their budgets, and we want to make sure they are not being short-sighted."

In April, the Claremont City Council agreed to stop dumping its trash at the Puente Hills Landfill and instead will take it to a private landfill in Brea.

The move saved the city nearly \$100,000 a year.

Coke said she was disappointed in Claremont's decision, but Claremont Community Services Director Scott Carroll said it was "purely economics."

"This is nothing against the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts," Carroll said. "We are looking out for our residents, and are trying to find a more cost-effective means to provide a service."

Coke is concerned that more cities will follow Claremont's lead and find private landfills in Southern California so the cities can avoid paying the Sanitation Districts' increased fees, which have been in place since 2005.

Sending trash by rail would nearly double the cost, and will likely result in increasing the fee from \$30 to \$60 per ton. The Sanitation Districts will hike the fee gradually.

"Not wanting residents to feel the sticker shock of that, we put in place a cost-transition program," Coke said.

Today, the average resident pays about 50 cents a month for the transition program. By 2013, that would be an additional \$2 or \$3 a month.

One of the existing landfills — though much smaller compared to Puente Hills — is run by the city of Whittier. It has a life of another 40 years.

Some private agencies and the trash haulers are waiting to see how the waste-by-rail program plays out, Coke said.

"But we don't have the luxury of waiting to see what happens," Coke said. "Our ultimate responsibility as a public agency is to make sure there is some place where we can take the trash."