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Construction begins on water treatment project

City News Service

The Eastern Municipal Water District, which serves most of western Riverside County, but not the Coachella Valley, on Monday marked the start of construction on a wastewater treatment project that will reduce carbon emissions while recycling water.

Water district officials joined representatives from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at the Moreno Valley Regional Water Reclamation Facility, in the 17-000 block of Kitching Street, where a groundbreaking was held for the Preliminary Treatment and Acid Phase Anaerobic Digestion Project.

The $46.3 million project, slated for completion in 2010, will allow the reclamation facility to purify waste water for non-potable uses, drawing on methane gas generated in the process to supply 40 percent of the facility's energy needs, according to Roxanne Rountree, a spokeswoman for the utility.

She said the anaerobic “digesters” will increase the efficiency of how human waste and other sludge is processed at the plant, reducing the need to haul away some of the matter, which in turn saves money and slashes greenhouse gas emissions.

Ratepayers should also notice savings, according to water district officials.

The project complements a $38 million capacity upgrade to the reclamation facility that began in May. Both projects are funded through California's Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund, which is supported by EPA grants.

“Clean water is a precious commodity, especially in arid Southern California,” said John Kemmerer, associate director of EPA Region 9. “We applaud the Eastern Municipal Water District for their spirit of innovation and environmental responsibility.”

Eastern Municipal Water District Board President Ron Sullivan said the utility's green initiatives will help it become “more self-reliant in energy generation and more cost- and energy-efficient in its treatment of wastewater.”

The utility serves an area that encompasses 555 square miles and is home to about 687,000 people.

According to the EPA, the California Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund has benefited from a $280 million infusion of federal stimulus dollars.

The reclamation facility projects will create about 125 construction jobs, according to Rountree.