



OREGON REFUSE & RECYCLING ASSOCIATION

April 7, 2020

Re: Safe Practices in Collecting Solid Waste and Recycling During COVID-19 Emergency

Some customers and communities are asking questions about the safety of collecting solid waste, both garbage and recycling, during the COVID-19 health emergency. Solid waste collection companies are providing an essential service necessary to maintain the health and safety of Oregon communities, and they can only do so if they can stay healthy. It is vital that customers take precautions to protect themselves, and to protect those workers who are on the frontlines of collecting solid waste and recycling.

Solid Waste: Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality has prepared a [Fact Sheet](#) to help the general public and solid waste company personnel understand how to manage solid waste that may potentially be exposed to COVID-19. The Fact Sheet states:

This material should be sealed in a trash bag and placed with regular trash. These trash materials can be handled by waste collectors and transfer stations like other solid waste generated from these locations. The sealed trash bag should be disposed of in landfills that are permitted to accept municipal solid waste.

Following this practice will help protect customers, solid waste collection employees and anyone else in our communities who might come into contact with solid waste that is potentially contaminated with COVID-19. A wide variety of citizens could be exposed to solid waste that is not their own, including residents in multi-family housing, businesses in multi-tenant properties, and workers in those locations. Of further concern is unsheltered populations who often frequent waste collection areas.

To protect everyone and prevent the possible spread of COVID-19, cities and counties and solid waste companies should communicate to customers and require that:

1. All garbage must be bagged, securely tied and placed in carts or dumpsters
 - No loose (unbagged) garbage outside of carts or dumpsters.
 - No opening/tearing/cutting of garbage bags after they have been placed out for collection by anyone – garbage must stay in bags that are securely tied.
2. No entry into carts or dumpsters is allowed by anyone other than the person who generated the garbage, and;
3. No removal of garbage once it has been placed inside a garbage cart or dumpster.

Recycling: Some customers are concerned about the possible transmission of COVID-19 occurring from recycling collectors picking up carts or bins which might be contaminated and then touching the next customer's cart or bin and transmitting the virus.

At this time, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) all agree that if handled with caution, using correct personal protective equipment and following safe hygiene practices, recycling materials are not a pathway to COVID-19 infection. The industry is monitoring health and safety studies and is prepared to make changes should new information warrant them.

Recycling collection employees are educated in best practices to avoid virus transmission, including good hygiene, wearing appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) such as gloves, and maintaining social distance of six feet from others. Customers should also practice similar protective practices, including:

1. Place all recycling in carts and bins for collection. Unlike garbage, DO NOT bag recycling.
2. Before setting out recycling AND after it has been collected, use a disinfectant (Clorox or Lysol, for example) to wipe down handles of carts and bins to protect yourself and the recycling collection employees, and;
3. Wash hands after returning carts and bins to storage locations and continue to maintain social distance from others.

To emphasize safe practices, ORRA has attached a helpful poster that can be used as a reminder for customers.

Please continue to help us protect the health and safety of all Oregonians by following these rules for garbage and recycling collection. If you have questions, please reach out to ORRA at the contact information listed below.

Thank you.