The new normal

Remember when self-isolation started and we thought it would only last a couple of weeks? Two months later and we're still dealing with COVID-19. This new reality will be with us for some time, a new "normal".

Overall, from the waste management perspective, things have gone fairly well thanks to your efforts, the courageous, committed collection crews, and our dedicated staff. This issue provides reminders and tips about some regular program information along with the new normal essentials. Keep up the good work. Stay safe!

COVID-19 update

Regional waste drop-off sites have re-opened:
On May 4, our transfer stations re-opened to the public during regular hours (Monday to Saturday, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., closed on statutory and designated holidays). This means that, if necessary, you can drop off bulky items, recyclables, yard waste, household hazardous waste, used cooking oil, renovation waste, and garbage.

Here's what you can expect:
- Fees will apply. No cash, please. Debit and credit payment, with TAP being preferred, please.
- New signage. Please read and follow directions.
- More kiosks are open in Waterloo, and use of intercoms, where available.
- New physical barriers to help protect staff and the public, such as the plexiglass shield at our Waterloo Household Hazardous Waste depot pictured below.
- Longer wait times. Spring is usually a busy time at our transfer stations, but to assure physical distancing fewer drop-off areas will be available for use, and staff will limit the number of vehicles allowed on site at one time. No compost and mulch for pick-up. As well, drop-off programs at our Waterloo site for bikes, Habitat for Humanity and Goodwill are closed until further notice.
Keep your clean reusable shopping bags handy! While some grocery stores are encouraging the use of their plastic or paper bags, and have changed their terms on using reusable bags, please keep your clean, reusable ones in your vehicle. There may be times when stores run out of bags (this happened to one of our staff).

Make your own mask: Canada.ca has instructions for sewn and no-sew variations, including reusing a t-shirt.

Bulky Item collection re-starts on May 25!

Collection of bulky/large items (items that do not fit into a regular garbage can/bag) will re-start the week of May 25. Bulky Item collection will follow our 2020 waste collection calendar; residents in the City of Kitchener and in the Townships can set out bulky items the week of May 25, and then residents in Cambridge and Waterloo can set out bulky items the following week.

Regular rules apply:

- Set out by 7 a.m.
- Download the Waste Whiz app to set collection reminders. Maximum of 3 items.
- Prepare properly. Use Waste Whiz item search box to find out how to prepare your items correctly.
- Only set out items when it's absolutely necessary.
- Ideally, set out items that require only one person to pick up.

What we're seeing at the curb: the new, the old and ongoing

While new waste-related COVID-19 measures are being enforced at the curb, there are a lot of ‘old’ issues cropping up, perhaps for new reasons.
**The issue**

**Late set-out**

This is an ongoing issue. Crews do not go back to collect late items. If left out, items could cause litter and by-law issues.

**Why is this happening?**

- Households are busier than ever with homeschooling kids and working from home, and may forget to set out their waste in time.
- Volumes at the curb have changed. There's more garbage and recyclables. Trucks may not collect at the time that you are "used to".

Our collection trucks are equipped with GPS that allow us to track where and when they are collecting in our community.

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**What to do**

Please, set out all of your waste items by 7 a.m. on your collection day.

- The earliest you can set out your items to the curb is 5 p.m. the night before your collection day.
- All uncollected items must be removed by 9 a.m. the day after your collection day.

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**Loose, unbagged garbage**

Put all garbage in bags, even if you set out a garbage can for collection.

Please make sure all bags are securely closed.

- Having all garbage in sealed bags is a new measure to protect collection crews. Having loose items, especially the blue disposable gloves in the first photo, puts collectors at risk.
- Dusty material such as sawdust in the second photo, or cold wood ashes, should ALWAYS be in sealed bags to protect collectors.

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**Unacceptable plastics in the green bin**

The only plastics we can accept are certified compostable plastic liner bags and pet waste bags. Look for these logos when buying liner bags:

Bags that indicate they are "biodegradable", "oxo-degradable", or "earth-friendly" are usually not certified compostable.

- Use the Waste Whiz item search box to check if an item is acceptable

Note: Paper liner bags do not need this certification.

This is an ongoing issue. Because people are staying at home, they are generating more waste, and possibly different types of waste.

The coffee pods that are in the first photo are not accepted in the green bin, not even if they indicate that they are "compostable". The dog waste bag is not the correct type of bag to put into the green bin.
On the bright side...

Are you getting a lot of home deliveries and don't know what to do with all that cardboard?

- Give it to your kids to decorate and create playhouses (for them or their toys).
- Cut large boxes in half to create study cubicles for your kids. It will help them focus on their onscreen lessons. They can also decorate it themselves. (An idea seen on the Marilyn Denis show in her interview with Daphne Oz.)
- Or recycle it. Flatten, size, and bundle it with twine no larger than 75x75x20 centimetres (30x30x8 inches). Preparing cardboard correctly matters: oversized cardboard cannot fit into the side hopper of the truck and can't be collected, and loose cardboard can create litter in our community.

Anecdotally, we hear that people aren't wasting food; everyone is at home eating food before it spoils! However, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations have published this cute flyer reminding us about how to avoid food waste during the pandemic.

Keep meals interesting and delay going out for groceries as long as possible. Look for new recipes online that use up what you have on hand in your fridge, freezer and pantry. Consider the mix and match menu, and use these COVID-19 food safety tips.

Are all of your cupboards and closets decluttered and reorganized? Keep all the reusable, household items set aside and wait for the day when donations are allowed once again.

Reach out and share this news with others!

Please forward this electronic newsletter to your family and friends using the link at the end, or even better, send them the link to the Region's subscription page. There they can quickly sign up for Waste Management eNews and any other topic that they are keen on.