



Cathy Curtis <curtisc@link75.org>

Fwd: COVID-19 information for transfer stations

1 message

David and Alison Berry <alisonberry374@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 30, 2020 at 3:49 PM

To: Cathy Curtis <curtisc@link75.org>

I think you may have already seen most of this, but I think the accompanying email is helpful. "Steve" is my alias!

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Hamlin, Eric P** <Eric.P.Hamlin@maine.gov>

Date: Thu, Jul 30, 2020 at 3:06 PM

Subject: COVID-19 information for transfer stations

To: alisonberry374@gmail.com <alisonberry374@gmail.com>

Hi, Steve,

This email is a follow up to our conversation today regarding transfer station operations and the COVID-19 pandemic. I sent out general information earlier this year, and the Department's official guidance has not changed since then. I will include that with this email, but wanted to summarize the key points of our conversation in this email.

Information so far, including the most recent updates, appears to indicate that COVID-19 transmission is primarily by droplets and airborne particles projected during person-to-person interactions, and less so by contact with potentially-contaminated items. Therefore, I recommend measures that will address person-to-person transmission, such as masks, glass or plexiglass barriers, physical distancing, and conducting interactions in open spaces or outdoors rather than in indoor, or more enclosed spaces. You mentioned a possible switch to a system where facility customers will drop off bags of trash through building openings, and then staff inside will handle them. This would appear to be a very reasonable way to limit face to face interactions, and in my opinion is a sensible approach.

In terms of handling trash and recyclables – there has been some suggestion that letting materials sit for a few days may decrease the already-small chance of transmission by contact with trash and recycling. For example, the Clynk bottle and can redemption program has asked customers to wait at least three days before dropping bags of bottles and cans off after those bags are tied off. In theory, this would allow time for any viruses on the containers to die off before they are handled by Clynk employees. (they ask people to mark the bags with a bright piece of flagging or tape with the words "3 days OK" to indicate that people have let them sit for three days before dropoff).

Although this is probably not a bad idea, the Department does not have similar guidance. Typical household trash (MSW) often contains small amounts of hazardous waste, diapers, food containers, cat litter, used facial tissues, and other potentially pathogen-bearing or dangerous items. If employees continue to use

appropriate precautions like wearing gloves (nitrile rubber are good for chemical and pathogen protection, but leather will also help protect against sharp items – they can double up if desired) and appropriate clothing while handling trash bags and then washing well before eating, smoking, etc., there should be very little potential for disease transmission – whether COVID, flu, colds, or other potential pathogens potentially in pet waste, rotting food, etc. In other words, the usual best handling practices should be fine for COVID as well.

Here is the COVID information I sent out earlier, at least to a lot of the facilities in Southern Maine I'll also include the Governor's emergency Executive Order regarding recycling – that is an attachment:

1. **Waste handling safety:** So far, we are not aware that handling of waste that may potentially be contaminated with COVID-19 requires anything other than typical best practices. Similarly, there is no information to suggest any increased danger from normal operations such as compactor cycling. We have obtained the following information from OSHA on waste handling:

“This section provides guidance for solid waste and wastewater management workers and employers. This guidance supplements the general, interim guidance for U.S. workers and employers of workers with potential occupational exposures to COVID-19, above.

Generally, management of waste that is suspected or known to contain or be contaminated with COVID-19 does not require special precautions beyond those already used to protect workers from the hazards they encounter during their routine job tasks in solid waste and wastewater management.

Some state, local, tribal and/or territorial health or environmental department(s) may have different or additional requirements for managing solid waste and wastewater.

Municipal Waste

Workers and employers should manage municipal (e.g., household, business) solid waste with potential or known COVID-19 contamination like any other non-contaminated municipal waste.

Use typical engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE, such as puncture-resistant gloves and face and eye protection, to prevent worker exposure to the waste streams (or types of wastes), including any contaminants in the materials, they manage. Such measures can help protect workers from sharps and other items that can cause injuries or exposures to infectious materials.

Recycling

As with municipal waste, employers and workers in the recycling industry should continue to use typical engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and PPE, such as puncture-resistant gloves and face and eye protection, to prevent worker exposure to recyclable materials they manage, including any contaminants in the materials.”

2. **Facility operations and services:** Some facilities are thinking about or have already begun scaling back operations. For example, I have been asked if it is OK to temporarily suspend collection of construction and demolition debris to help decrease traffic and to prepare for potential decrease in staffing. This is acceptable provided that critical services like collection of putrescible waste such as MSW or segregated organics are maintained. I also recommend that collection of potentially problematic waste streams like universal waste be continued if possible to discourage illegal dumping or placing of such items in MSW. Another facility in this area has completely shut down their transfer station, but that city has curbside pickup of MSW, recycling, and organics, so they are maintaining the most critical services.

In any case, if any changes are proposed municipalities should do everything they can to inform the public about any changes to operations, and facility operators should contact DEP solid materials staff so that we can keep track and help troubleshoot.

3. **Continuity of operations:** Facilities are taking different approaches to ensure operational continuity. For example, one town has paired one of the two regular transfer station staff with someone from public works, and these new teams work alternate weeks in the hopes that both full time staff people will not be out sick at the same time. Obviously that may not be possible everywhere, but this would be a good time to ensure that any potential backup personnel are familiar with facility operations and the operations manual.

I hope that helps. Please let me know if you have any more questions.

Sincerely,

Eric P. Hamlin

Environmental Specialist

Division of Solid Materials Management

Maine Department of Environmental Protection

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