NC Response to COVID-19

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North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality
Survey to Local Governments

Sent to all 442 local government recycling programs

33% response rate, with 148 unique respondents
COVID Survey Questions for Local Governments

1. Have your recycling costs increased since COVID-19?

2. Due to COVID-19, has your local government considered changes to your recycling program?

3. What changes has your local government already implemented?

4. What can DEACS do to assist your government's recycling program during COVID-19?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Change</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No increase in cost</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but anticipates processing cost increases</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, but anticipates collection cost increases</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, MRF processing costs have increased</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, collection costs have increased</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only 28 are considering changes to program
Considered Changes to Programs

- Dropping program element or program
- Dropping special item collection
- Reduce staff on collection trucks
- Shorten convenience center hours
- Expand convenience center hours
- Reduce collection frequency
- Raise fees
- Increase cart tagging
Follow Up

- Targeted outreach to respondents
- Technical assistance
- Developed new tools
COVID-19 Social Media

DO YOUR PART
Be Cart Smart!

NO Single-use gloves in the recycling cart! Put them in the trash.

NO Single-use masks in the recycling cart! Put them in the trash.
SAVING RECYCLING

These are unprecedented times for the recycling industry. Already experiencing market fluctuations and educational challenges, recycling their taxed COVID-19, which affected budgets and service provision while leading to increased residential volumes with more contamination. Going forward, some local governments may be faced with challenges as they examine their budgets and assess possible shortfalls.

The N.C. Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service (DEACS) would like to suggest some options to consider should you be faced with altering your recycling program. Remember that cutting a recycling program does not make the items that would have gone into the recycling bin go away; rather, that volume and associated costs that had been added to your solid waste budget.

If faced with a budget shortfall, communities should consider the following recommendations—many of which would never be suggested under non-pandemic circumstances—such as providing consumers with recycling programs intact during extraordinary times. Manufacturers in North Carolina and across the country are still dependent on recyclable materials to make everyday products like paper, plastic, and food packaging. Temporary changes should always be communicated to your residents with honest and concise messaging.

Prevention

Before making any cuts or changes to your recycling program, we recommend a close review of your budget to look for ways to increase revenues. The Recycling Partnership found that 84 percent of Americans view recycling as a valuable public service. The per household cost to keep your recycling program running could only be pennies per day. While not all local governments in North Carolina charge fees, those that do assess an average fee of $4 per household per month for combined solid waste and recycling services in 2019.

Small Changes

Special Collections and Service Frequency

Eliminate Special Collections: Some curbside special collections programs such as textiles or electronics could temporarily be changed to drop-off only. You may also want to look at the costs for bulky items and white goods collection as they could be changed to drop-site or fee-for-collection.

Reduce Service Frequency: If your program has an existing program, studies show that changing your pickup schedule to twice per month with 16-gallon carts has a large effect on your budget (size change in the amount of material collected). Most of the industry has moved to every-other-week (EOW) pickup. If your pickup schedule is already EOW, a temporary change to monthly pickup can keep help operating costs down. These options can free additional traffic to your drop sites, so you may need to adjust your hours of operation. To keep recycling route drivers engaged, they can be temporarily assigned to drop sites.

Collect Glass Separate from Single-Stream: Most material recovery facilities (MRFs) in North Carolina have multi-tiered pricing schemes with glass on or glass-only options. Choosing glass-out is a quick way to collect costs from your programs as opposed to glass-in. However, we recommend that you start with your county to have existing convenience sites to collect glass. A second option is to convert one of your established drop sites to have a glass-only drop site. If you do not have any existing drop sites of your own, you can make one with very limited space. Grant funds can be used to help you build a glass collection center and educate the public about changes.

Reducing Cost

Removing Glass

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Improving Revenues

Messaging Matters

Talking to Your Residents

Present potential changes as an opportunity for the recycling public to help during these unprecedented times. The additional work required now for recycling is an opportunity for your residents to be part of the solution. Through the state’s recent Recycle Right NC campaign, we saw that the majority of people who recycle want to be involved, are enthusiastic about recycling, and will support changes if they appear to serve their civic responsibility and the need for their participation to ensure success.

Educators are key to any successful program change. Yet, your residents know what changes are taking place, why it needs to happen, where it will start, and how long it will be in effect. DEACS staff are available to help with your communications or share best practices on how to communicate with the public to avoid undue frustration. Educational materials have been designed to support strong messaging for communities that need to make program changes. A phone call or email to our staff could save you months of resident confusion and dissatisfaction.

Reach out to a DEACS staff member anytime for assistance.

Click here to review DEACS grant opportunities.
COVID-19 Recycling Relief Grant

$20,000 maximum

For public or private organizations

8 awarded grantees
Backyard Compost Grant

Newfound interest in composting

$20,000 grant to local government

Bins, outreach, kitchen containers

2 awarded grantees
Webinars with the CRA

COVID Safety in Recycling
Adapting to The New Normal
Defending Recycling

Two more in the works
140 signed up for 6 meetings

Statewide update

LG clients update each other
Lessons from the meetings

- Residential tonnages are way up
- As is contamination
- Increased special collections
- Interest in tagging and enforcement