COVID-19: GUIDANCE FOR MANAGEMENT OF HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRES (HWRCs)

Purpose

This non-statutory guidance is to assist Councils and the waste sector to make appropriate decisions around HWRC services in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The waste sector is of vital importance in the safeguarding of public health, protecting the environment and servicing the economy. Waste and recycling services are critical public services and should be maintained as far as possible in order to protect the health of the Northern Ireland public from a build-up of waste; safeguard the important flow of materials, such as for food packaging; and deliver a low carbon circular economy agenda.

Key Principles

In addition to current principles, requirements and duties in waste, environmental and health protection legislation, the following key principles have been identified as a basis for consideration when making decisions to deal with the impact of Covid-19 on services:

Protection of human health and the environment: Protect human health (including the workforce collecting and processing waste material) and the environment from the adverse consequences of waste not being managed effectively (in line with the scientific assessment of the risks and health advice on the approaches that support the controlling of the spread of COVID-19).

Social equity: Ensuring that proper account is taken of those needing support and those householders with limited storage capacity at their dwellings.

Waste hierarchy: Manage waste in line with the waste hierarchy, in priority order: reduce, reuse, recycle, energy recovery, landfill, unless over-ridden by the need to protect human health and the environment.

Resilience: Maintain the operation of a diverse range of facilities in order to provide resilience if key services are impacted or close down.

Preservation of material flows: Ensure the flow of material to businesses that use recyclate, such as for food packaging, and derive energy from waste.
Guidance on Applying Principles

There are two priorities which must take precedence when considering the reopening of HWRCs: **SAFETY FIRST** and **CLEAR COMMUNICATIONS**.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with resources already available, such as Covid-19 Safety Measures Advice for Businesses. You may also find the Waste Industry Safety and Health Forum (WISH) guidance helpful.

Restarting Operations

Where a Council decides to re-open a HWRC, even on a restricted basis they should:

- Review the site layout including identifying which containers should be opened for which waste streams. Consider opening alternate bays to enforce social distancing.
- Operatives must be issued with appropriate PPE.
- Implement a stringent cleaning regime for sites. Handrails and contact points should ideally be disinfected every 30 mins. Cleaning stations should be set up for staff and the public to use.
- Engage with PSNI and inform them that HWRCs will be re-opening to confirm that members of the public travelling to the site is deemed essential.
- Engage with staff and relevant trade unions to inform them of re-opening and to identify any issues of concern for staff.

In order to maintain social distancing at an operational site you should:

- Carry out a risk assessment, taking into consideration any circumstances where it would be difficult for staff or visitors to be 2 metres (6ft) apart. Establish whether modifications can be made to mitigate that risk.
- Undertake necessary pre-start training in line with risk assessment and review operations on a daily basis. Re-inforce safety measures at the start of each shift.
- Limit the types of vehicle and the number of visitors on site at any one time, this will be the best way to enforce effective social distancing.
- Display signage and communicate that no help can be given by operatives.
- Use floor markings and signage to help maintain effective social distancing.
- If necessary, especially for sites adjoining main roads, liaise with the PSNI to help manage busier periods, such as weekends and bank holidays.
- Consider communicating the need for identification to prove residency at the gate, ensuring travel to the site is not taking place from outside the Council area.

In order to keep materials from the sites moving:

- Councils should liaise with contractors prior to re-opening sites to give them adequate time to resume operations and reengage any furloughed workers. This will also help identify the types and quantities of materials that can be collected once the site reopens.
• Consideration should be given to the types of materials being accepted or being restricted, which could, for example, encourage an increase in fly-tipping.
• Where a temporary increase in storage is required, engage with NIEA to discuss temporary modifications to waste management authorisations.

**Communications to Residents**

• Ensure websites, social media channels and texts/apps to residents are up to date with the latest available information, including opening hours and any restrictions.
• Consider advertising on radio, in local newspapers or other publications.
• Ensure signage at the sites is up to date, clear and that temporary signage masks normal operating information.
• Overall, ensure that all communications are unambiguous and clearly set out the rules for using the site.

**Suggested Communications Messages**

Here are some communications you may want to consider:

• Anyone who is self-isolating or has symptoms of COVID-19, e.g. high fever; new and continuous cough, **must not visit a HWRC under any circumstances.**
• Visits to sites must only be made if absolutely necessary, e.g. if storing the waste at home presents a health and safety risk.
• Try to combine visits to sites with other activities, such as grocery shopping, to limit the amount of travel.
• Refrain from undertaking unnecessary DIY, conducting ‘clear outs’, creating excess garden waste or other ‘waste generating’ activities until the service is operating normally again.
• Promote waste prevention activities, such as composting for organic waste.
• The social distancing rule of 2m (6ft) will be strictly enforced. People attending the site must be prepared to unload their own waste. Operatives will be unable to assist.
• The restricted opening hours are in place.
• Restrictions to the number of cars on site.
• Be patient and respect site staff.
• If restrictions apply, communicate the type waste being accepted and inform the public they must have it appropriately segregated prior to visiting to minimise the time at the site.
• If restrictions apply, the types of vehicles allowed access to the site, such as cars only - no trailers or high sided vehicles.
• If required, identification will be required to show proof of residency in the Council area in order to gain entry to the site.

Further information on the content of this guidance can be provided by contacting Colin.Breen@daera-ni.gov.uk