



COVID 19 Guide for Waste Operations

At this time, CDC and OSHA are not issuing waste and recycling specific guidelines for the handling of waste and recycling materials related to COVID 19. If this changes, NWRA will alert its members.

BACKGROUND

What is COVID-19?

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), risk of catching COVID-19 is higher for people who are in close contact with someone who already has the disease. The virus is thought to spread mainly through respiratory droplets (not truly airborne) produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It also may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads. However, OSHA states that without sustained human-to-human transmission, most American workers are not at significant risk of infection.

The federal government continues to evaluate the transmissibility and severity of COVID-19 virus.

What general precautions should be taken to protect waste and recycling worker safety?

General precautionary measures should include avoiding touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands and washing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds on a regular basis throughout the day. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available. In addition, wipe down surfaces with disinfectant; and sneeze or cough into your shoulder/arm or a tissue. It is also good to practice good housekeeping and minimize clutter where the virus could accumulate. There is some evidence that HEPA filters in room air-cleaners might provide protection against the virus due to the size of the droplets in which the virus is carried. Buying such air cleaners for offices and control rooms may be advised.

OSHA also states that workers use appropriate engineering and administrative controls, safe work practices, and personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent worker exposure.

Are there any special efforts that need to be made to disinfect surfaces from COVID-19?

The virus can easily be killed by detergents and disinfectants at regular temperatures used for washing. For a specific list of approved products, please refer to EPA's list of registered antimicrobial products for use against Novel Coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, the cause of COVID-19. See these links: <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-03/documents/sars-cov-2->

[list_03-03-2020.pdf](#) and <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/cleaning-disinfection.html>

GUIDANCE

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.

OSHA's guidance on reducing risk to exposure:

- Promote frequent and thorough hand washing by providing workers, customers, and worksite visitors with a place to wash their hands. If soap and running water are not immediately available, provide alcohol-based hand rubs containing at least 60% alcohol.
- Encourage workers to stay home if they are sick.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes.
- Maintain regular housekeeping practices, including routine cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, equipment, and other elements in the work environment. When choosing cleaning chemicals, employers should consult information on Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved disinfectant labels with claims against emerging viral pathogens. Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims are expected to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use of all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, PPE).

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.

Role-Specific Guidance

Drivers, Helpers, Sorters, and Post-Collection Operators

- At beginning and end of shift, sanitize commonly touched items in the truck and heavy equipment (i.e. steering wheel, gear shifter, automated joystick, handles, tablets, etc.).
- Avoid human contact (including customers) during lunch, breaks and routes.
- Sanitize hands before and after using fueling station.
 - Wipe down fueling station apparatus that you would touch.
- When working in groups, increase sanitization frequency to three times daily.
- Properly use all provided PPE (i.e. gloves, eye protection, etc.).
- Avoid congregation of more than 10 people, including recycling centers.

Dispatch and Scale House Operators

- Clean and disinfect hands hourly.
- Use radio-based communication to relay information.
- Do not share pens, pencils, phones, etc. with others.
- Sanitize your hands after handling driver phones, radios, keys, clipboards, etc.

Additional Guidance for Scale House Operators:

- Wear latex gloves at all times, changing them at least three times per day. Latex gloves are best, but any disposable glove is better than nothing. Non disposable gloves that can be washed daily are better than nothing. Gloves that cannot be washed daily should be avoided.
 - Avoid touching face while wearing gloves.
- Clean and sanitize hands after removing gloves.

Technicians

- Prior to servicing a vehicle, sanitize commonly touched items (i.e. steering wheel, gear shifter, automated joystick, door handle, etc.).
- Wear gloves at all times and sanitize hands before and after use of shared tools. Latex gloves are best, but any disposable glove is better than nothing. Non disposable gloves that can be washed daily are better than nothing. Gloves that cannot be washed daily should be avoided.

Management

- Look for signs and symptoms related to sickness of each employee.
- Stagger safety meetings to ensure no more than 10 people.
- Stagger start times of drivers to reduce crew-in/out size to no more than 10 people.
- Require multiple break areas to eliminate congregation of more than 10 people (i.e. Sorters at a recycling center).
- Increase frequency of janitorial service to nightly and expand scope to a deeper cleaning.
- Ensure sanitation products are properly stocked and secured.

FAQs

Is it safe for Drivers, Helpers, Operators and Sorters to handle MSW or Recycling?

- Yes. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) are not calling for any additional steps to handle MSW or recycling.
- Waste handling is not a disease pathway and has not been identified as needing any special precaution by the WHO or CDC.
- Household waste is not considered regulated medical waste, even if the person in the home on your route has an infectious disease, such as COVID-19.
- As with all handling of solid waste and recycling, caution and PPE should always be used. It's important to continue practicing the good hand washing hygiene habits that have kept you healthy on the job.
- NWRA continues to monitor the CDC daily for any additional recommendations or changes.

What is considered “good” hand washing hygiene?

- Cleaning hands with soap and water is extremely important for at least 20 seconds
- If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- When hands are visibly dirty, they should be washed with soap and water for at least 20–30 seconds.
- Hand hygiene should be performed during at least these seven moments:
 1. Before putting on PPE;
 2. After removing PPE;
 3. When changing gloves;
 4. After coming into contact with waste;
 5. After contact with any respiratory secretions (if you sneeze or cough, for example);
 6. Before eating; and
 7. After using the restroom.

What PPE or work practices should Drivers, Helpers, Operators, Sorters, etc. be following?

- All employees handling any waste or recycling should be following the PPE requirements of their job. Always wear specified gloves for your job or task.
- Customary work practices and precautions taken by employees (while using the correct PPE) will protect you from disease transmission. COVID-19 is spread person-to-person through contact with and/or sharing surfaces contaminated by a sick person. Employees should avoid contact and practice social distancing with other employees and the public. This includes shaking hands, hugging, and sharing food and drinks.
- Practice good personal hygiene. Be sure to use disinfectant wipes whenever you share tools and equipment.

- Remain calm and contact your healthcare provider if you have medical questions or feel sick.

Further Resources

NWRA

<https://wasterecycling.org/page/covid19resources>

OSHA

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/>

CDC

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html?deliveryName=USCDC_10_4-DM22504

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html>