



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
1021 Redmond Road  
Williston, VT 05495

EMAIL [info@cswd.net](mailto:info@cswd.net)  
TEL (802) 872-8100

[www.cswd.net](http://www.cswd.net)

April 7, 2020

Vermont House Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife Committee

RE: Legislative Response to Solid Waste during State of Emergency Covid-19

Jen Holliday, CSWD Director of Public Policy and Communications

Dear Chairwoman Sheldon and Committee Members,

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you about the Chittenden Solid Waste District's response to COVID-19 and ANR's proposed changes to Act 148. I will first inform the committee about the changes we have implemented at CSWD facilities in response to COVID-19 and then speak to our position on ANR's proposed changes to Act 148.

CSWD has seven Drop-Off Centers (DOCs) located throughout Chittenden County where residents can bring us their trash, recycling, food scraps and numerous other special wastes for recycling. We also have a permanent year-round household hazardous waste collection facility, the Environmental Depot, as well as Green Mountain Compost, which is the largest food scrap composting facility in the state. We also own a single-stream Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) where over half of the residential single-stream recyclables generated in the state are sorted and shipped to market.

Two weeks ago, it was brought to our attention that some of our Drop-Off Center employees were potentially exposed to the Coronavirus outside of the workplace and had worked with other staff, potentially exposing them as well. We made the decision out of an abundance of caution to ask all the affected employees to self-quarantine. Our DOC staff routinely interact with the public and so we took this precaution to protect the public as well as other employees. This left us with an immediate staffing shortage, and we realized that we needed to focus our resources to provide continuity of service throughout the state of emergency, so we closed all our Drop-Off Centers except for our largest, centrally located drop-off site on Redmond Road in Williston.

We then implemented changes at that location to minimize exposure and maximize throughput. We reduced the materials we accept at that site to only the essential three: household trash, recycling, and food scraps. We added staff and reconfigured the site for fast throughput with better social distancing for our customers. We changed our pricing to encourage less frequent and more consolidated trips, which can save our customers money and significantly reduce potential for exposure to our staff and our customers. We're processing about two to three times the number of customers that we normally see at this site in a day in a much safer and streamlined way. For now, this will continue to be the only CSWD DOC open.

Our Green Mountain Compost facility, also located on Redmond Road, is open for residential and business drop-off of food scraps, clean wood, leaves, and yard debris. There are no fees for any of this material except for food scraps from haulers therefore there is very little interaction between our customers and staff. We have seen a significant decline in the overall tonnage of food scraps brought to Green Mountain Compost in the past three weeks due to the closure of schools and restaurants. We anticipate at least a 30% reduction in food scraps during this and the coming months. We are receiving a tremendous volume of wood and leaves.

We believe we are serving our customers' essential waste management needs in an efficient and safe manner with these two facilities.

We have temporarily ceased our household hazardous waste program except for emergency needs. Our materials recovery facility (MRF) currently remains fully operational with no changes.

CSWD received the proposed changes to Act 148 from ANR yesterday afternoon and were quite surprised that ANR's position has changed significantly since their testimony last week in the Senate. CSWD does not support any of these changes.

### **CSWD opposes a delay in the food scrap landfill ban from July 1, 2020 to January 15, 2021.**

Act 148 passed unanimously in 2012. The Coronavirus arrived 15 weeks before the July 1, 2020 implementation date of the final provision in this law. Stakeholders have had almost the entire eight years to prepare for the full implementation of the food scrap landfill ban. Most of the generators that are already required to divert their food scraps are doing so, and many residents and businesses that aren't required to do so are diverting voluntarily ahead of schedule.

Solid waste districts across the state have been working hard for several years to communicate, educate, and provide tools and assistance for food scrap diversion to their communities. This assistance has included backyard compost workshops and discounted backyard compost bins and food scrap collection containers, technical assistance and presentations to schools, businesses, and multi-residential facilities, and assisting event venues with food scrap diversion best practices.

Significant investment in infrastructure has been made throughout the state. Solid Waste Districts and private businesses have invested in composting operations and food scrap collection and hauling equipment and staff. These businesses are counting on this law to be fully enacted.

Some of these businesses are entrepreneurial, niche food-scrap hauling businesses that emerged as a direct result of Act 148. We contacted food-scrap-only hauling services in our area last week. All reported they are continuing to provide this service and don't need a delay in the landfill ban. In fact, because they have lost commercial accounts, they have additional capacity to service residents. One of these hauling services reported that their business has been doubling every year thanks to citizen awareness of the upcoming ban. If the ban is pushed off, they expect their growth to flatten if not decline and it would increase costs to their existing customers. It would also prevent them from being able to provide services to more communities where there might otherwise be increasing demand with the ban.

There has been a lot of anticipation and preparation for this law to go into effect. Inevitably with or without the state of emergency, some businesses and residents are going to be ready for the food

scrap ban and some are not. A six-month delay is not going to change that. We urge the Committee to keep the law in place as enacted and instead ask ANR to use their enforcement discretion for however long they think is reasonable for this last sector of food scrap generators to comply. That has always been CSWD's mode of operation throughout the implementation of Act 148 --education and assistance first, enforcement only when necessary.

**CSWD is opposed to discontinuing the requirement for haulers to provide collection of recyclables during the COVID-19 state of emergency and opposed to giving the Secretary authorization to allow recyclables to be landfilled during any state of emergency.**

These two provisions are very troubling for us. Our Solid Waste Management Ordinance has required recycling by all Chittenden County residents and businesses since 1993. Our members have been enthusiastically participating in recycling for more than 25 years. We continue to collect recyclables at our Drop-Off Center and the recyclables brought to our MRF continue to be processed and marketed. We have not heard from our hauling community or from customers that they serve that service can no longer be provided for curbside collection of recyclables. The City of Burlington continues to provide curbside collection of recycling to its residents. Recyclables are not a health hazard when cleaned and properly stored. Disposal of recyclables in the landfill is not protecting public health and it is certainly not protecting the environment. Even if a hauler is not able to collect recycling for some period of time, it doesn't warrant landfilling as the alternative. Let me be clear, if this were enacted, and haulers stopped providing curbside recycling service, we would be inundated with their customers that want to do the right thing by bringing their recycling to our drop-off location and completely overwhelming our facility.

We do not agree that this state of emergency warrants a statewide repeal of the landfill ban nor a statewide repeal of the hauler requirement for collecting recyclables as proposed by ANR. CSWD has serious concerns about the long-term impact that this policy would have on our community and how they will view the importance of recycling in the future. We are concerned that some would not go back to recycling after the state of emergency because they may then view recyclables as trash or see it as no longer important because of the actions of the State and the Legislature.

There is one provision in ANR's proposal that CSWD supports: Giving the Secretary authority to allow landfilling of recyclables if there are no markets. Recycling simply cannot happen without viable markets. We have experienced some close calls with a lack of markets for paper the past couple of years. However, this is not related to the state of emergency and should be more thoughtfully considered by the Legislature after the state of emergency has passed. Markets for recycling exist today and even have improved slightly this past month. We don't anticipate recycling markets to disappear during the pandemic.

CSWD has adjusted our operations to COVID-19. Our community has adjusted well to these changes and is being served to meet essential needs including recycling and food scrap diversion. ANR's proposal is not a necessary COVID-19 response and only adds disruption and confusion to our system that we have worked hard to put into place. We believe the State's proposals will cause irreversible damage to solid waste diversion efforts across Vermont.