



April 9, 2020

Vermont Public Interest Research Group
Attn: Paul Burns
141 Main Street, Suite 6
Montpelier, VT 05602

Dear Mr. Burns,

I am writing in regard to your communication of April 8, 2020, that was widely distributed throughout Vermont. It is important to me to correct some of the gross misrepresentations you make in your “petition drive”.

Casella, as well as other waste haulers in the state, have proactively asked the Governor and the Legislature to grant the Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources the authority to commingle recycling and solid waste during states of emergency. It would then be up to the Secretary to determine if there was merit to a request from a waste management and recycling company to do so.

Casella operates two recycling facilities in the State of Vermont. If we are faced with an outbreak of COVID19 at one of the facilities it may necessitate having to close the facility until such a time as we have performed an intensive cleaning effort and have sufficient personnel to run the operation safely. It is widely known that multiple recycling facilities have been closed nationally for this very reason, and this situation in Vermont would warrant Casella asking the Secretary for the ability to send recyclable materials to the landfill.

If one of our hauling companies has an outbreak of COVID19 and we have a shortage of drivers or helpers, we may not be able to send out the two trucks that are required to manage solid waste in one pick up, and recycling in another. In that case we may ask the Secretary for the ability to send one truck and bring waste and recyclable materials to the landfill.

The notion that waste haulers are “using the pandemic as the excuse to trash recycling” is an outrageous claim. You state “We support giving sanitation workers all the protective equipment they need to be safe in their jobs. We urge the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Health Department to take a look at current waste and recycling collection practices, and issue guidance if necessary, to improve practices during this crisis.” Casella has provided our employees with personal protective equipment to be safe at their jobs, and has been carefully following the guidance of the CDC and OSHA since the beginning of the pandemic. The Department of Environmental Conservation has issued guidance on the matter of sending recycling to the landfill on an as needed basis. As quoted from the VT Digger article of April 8, 2020, titled “State Recommends Delaying Food Scraps Ban, Changes to Recycling Rules”:

“DEC is also recommending that lawmakers grant Agency of Natural Resources Secretary Julie Moore the authority to temporarily lift the ban on recyclables being landfilled, and to allow haulers not to collect recyclables during the state of emergency. Walke said DEC

recommended those changes so haulers, some of whom are facing staffing shortages, would not have to have separate trucks out collecting waste and due to concerns about how long the virus could last on different types of recyclables.

“The first and foremost (thing) we need from a public health standpoint is to have trash removed, and for the people who provide those goods and services to be able to continue to do their work,” he said.”

The position of the regulatory body tasked with overseeing waste management and recycling does not appear to be in keeping with what you state in your “petition drive” correspondence.


In addition, you note “To be clear, we know of no state that has decided to end its recycling programs during this health emergency. If recycling can still happen in a hot spot like New York City, why should Vermont turn its back on this important environmental program?”

Based on a conversation I had with the General Counsel of the Department of Environmental Conservation of New York State yesterday, the DEC is allowing recycling to be disposed of in New York. The DEC already had the authority to make that determination and mandate. We believe it prudent that the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources also have that authority and flexibility to act in the case of circumstances such as a pandemic.

The concept of mandating that residential customers compost food scraps in the midst of a pandemic is irresponsible on multiple levels. Casella has been a leader in organics recycling, and we have been partnering with large commercial customers in processing high quantity, high quality organics for over a decade. We understand and appreciate the value of composting and organics management practices. The request to the Legislature to extend the implementation of the residential food scraps ban out until early 2021 is firstly about the safety and protection of our employees. From a hauling company perspective, it involves sending out yet another collection vehicle with additional personnel. Shifting the implementation date certainly does not warrant public outcry, but is the socially responsible decision to make, and we commend the Agency of Natural Resources for their recommendation to do so.

It is unfortunate that during a pandemic, when frankly we should be supporting what is best for our citizens’ health and safety, you chose to distribute communication that contained inflammatory misinformation in an effort to further your interests.

Sincerely,



John W. Casella
Chairman & CEO

cc: Members of the House Committee of Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife