

## FAQs: Kerbside recycling collections transitioning through COVID-19 National Alert Levels

Updated 8 May 2020

**We're currently at Alert Level 3.** Cabinet meet on Monday 11 May to decide if we are ready move to Alert Level 2 or remain in Level 3. The below information outlines the two different scenarios we are planning for in order for kerbside collection to resume.

### Scenario 1: If we move to Level 2:

- We will resume picking up co-mingled recycling (WCC clear/green bags or wheelie bin) on your allocated recycling day.
- We will try as best we can to recycle as much as possible. But it is inevitable that some recycling will go to landfill as it is likely to be contaminated.
- Please ensure your recycling is as clean as possible.

### Scenario 2 – If we stay at Level 3 for an extended period:

- We will resume picking up co-mingled recycling (WCC clear/green bags or wheelie bin) on your allocated recycling day. Our collectors feel more confident of being able to collect safely given the reducing trend of the virus spread, particularly in Wellington.
- The sorting plant is not open at Level 3 as we cannot maintain the required physical distancing in this operation so this will mean all co-mingled recycling at this time will go to landfill
- If you don't want it going to landfill you can continue to stockpile co-mingled recycling, although official government advice does not recommend it
- Glass will begin to be collected on your collection day in green crates and will be able to be recycled as it does not go through the sorting plant. However, it will not be colour sorted due to the high manual handling element of this process and the risk of the virus still being present. We have worked with our contractors to enable this material to be sent to Auckland for processing without any physical contact with staff.

**Glass:** Under normal collections, glass bottles are individually hand sorted into colours at the kerbside by Envirowaste staff. We will be able to collect glass at Level 2 and 3 and it will be recycled, however it may not be possible to colour sort glass bottles because of the risk of the virus being present.

### Important note about collection days:

As collections will resume on Tuesday 12 May, we have agreed with our collectors that Saturday 16 May will be in place of Monday 11 May for collection day. This is a similar approach to what we do for Christmas and New Year.

See [wellington.govt.nz/collectionday](https://wellington.govt.nz/collectionday) for information on collection days. This link will also give you options to download the recycling calendar that relates to your area.

## **Frequently asked questions:**

### **Q: Why are we starting collections now?**

**A:** We received a lot of feedback from residents throughout Level 4 and Level 3 who felt that we should have continued collections throughout these alert levels. If level 3 is extended, this places additional storage demands on those who are choosing to stockpile, or additional costs on residents who do not have room to stockpile and need to put their recycling in rubbish bags or bins.

We're conscious of the ongoing financial implications for those residents, so are offering residents the opportunity to put their recycling out for collection if they want to from Tuesday 12 May.

In addition to this, due to the reducing trend of the virus spread, particularly in Wellington, our collectors feel more confident of being able to collect safely at this point. To date, there have been no cases of rubbish or recycling collectors having contracted the virus through their work, and therefore our contractor is comfortable for services to resume.

If you don't want to have your recycling collected in Level 3, please continue to hold onto it until Level 2 when the recycling sorting plant will open.

### **Q: Do I have to use my official receptacles for rubbish – green crates, recycling bags or wheelie bin?**

**A:** Yes – these are designed with health and safety in mind. If they are not in official receptacles (green crate, recycling bag or wheelie bin), then it puts our collectors at risk as they will not be able to check the contents of bags before picking them up.

When collections resume regardless of levels, we will NOT be collecting any recycling in unofficial bags, crates or bins.

If you don't have any recycling bags left, unfortunately you will have to hold on to your recycling or put it in your WCC yellow rubbish bags.

Once service centres and libraries are open, they will be provided with stock so that people can purchase bags and crates.

### **Q: When does the annual delivery of recycling bags begin?**

**A:** We will resume the delivery of the annual distribution of recycling bags from Tuesday 12 May when collections start. These will only be distributed to those who are due to receive them – we cannot facilitate delivery of bags to wheelie bin addresses.

The distribution normally takes place over 6 weeks, so please bear with us as we work through our normal delivery schedule. When the service centre and libraries open, we will ensure that they have a stock of bags so that residents can purchase them.

### **Q: Why aren't yellow bags free?**

**A:** The Southern Landfill and rubbish and recycling kerbside collections are paid for by Landfill fees and the purchase of yellow rubbish bags – it is not paid for by rates. We need to keep these costs in place to maintain these essential services.

## **LEVEL 2**

### **Q: Can I put all my bags/ glass out on the first day of recycling?**

**A:** Please put your recycling out on your usual collection day, in line with the street directory calendar.

See [wellington.govt.nz/collectionday](https://www.wellington.govt.nz/collectionday) for information on collection days. This link will also give you options to download the recycling calendar that relates to your area.

For example if Tuesday 12 May would normally be the week you put glass out, please only put glass out. The alternate week recyclables will not be collected.

### **Q: Why can you accept glass now when you couldn't before?**

**A:** For the first few weeks of collections, glass will not be colour sorted. This eliminates the need to a large amount of manual handling. We are still able to have this non-sorted glass recycled. Due to the reducing trend of the virus spread, particularly in Wellington, our collectors feel more confident of being able to collect safely. To date, there have been no cases of rubbish or recycling collectors having contracted the virus through their work, and therefore our contractor is comfortable for services to resume, but will not be sorting the glass into colours.

### **Q: Does that mean glass is going into the Landfill?**

**A:** Non-colour sorted glass will be able to be recycled. The glass processor in Auckland has agreed to accept larger volumes of mixed glass at this time.

### **Q: What goes to landfill and what goes to the recycling sorting facility?**

**A:** We will deliver as much as we can to the recycling sorting facility. But when items are contaminated they cannot be sorted, therefore these will need to go to the landfill.

If there is more than 10 per cent of contaminated material in the recycling stream, it cannot be processed through the facility as the quality of the product will be too poor to attract any buyers. We don't want that to happen so we need everyone to make a big effort to ensure only clean cardboard, paper, tin and aluminium cans, glass bottles, and rigid plastic bottles and containers marked with numbers go into your recycling.

In addition to this, if we receive too much stockpiled recycling and we cannot sort it in time, this becomes a health hazard. Therefore this is when we will make a call to send some material to the landfill

Our goal is to see as much recycled as possible, but our ability to achieve that relies on everyone playing their part – so make sure it's clean and where possible put it out in stages.

### **Q: Will my stockpiled recycling actually be recycled?**

**A:** It is possible that a lot of recycling will be contaminated with food residue, particularly if it has been held for more than a month. Where this is the case, it may be landfilled.

We expect the focus to be initially on high value recyclables such as cardboard, high value plastic (clear PET 1), and glass. Whilst we will be working hard to make sure that as much as possible is recycled, it is likely that some recycling will be landfilled.

**Cardboard:** Neatly bundled or stacked cardboard will be collected next to a wheelie bin or bag – not glass collection day. EnviroWaste will be running an additional truck to sweep through and pick up large amounts of bundled cardboard. The bundled cardboard may not be picked up initially with the main collection but will be later that day. Please bear with us as collections will take longer than normal.

**Q: If I haven't had my recycling bags delivered, what should I do?**

**A:** Recycling bag deliveries will begin the same time that recycling collections resume. Please note the delivery schedule runs across 6 weeks, so please bear with us. Our normal process of missed bag deliveries applies – please wait until the end of June before you contact us about missed deliveries.

If you have been missed, we will arrange for delivery of the bags. If you have run out, the service centres and libraries will have stock available to purchase when they reopen. See [wellington.govt.nz/rubbishandrecycling](http://wellington.govt.nz/rubbishandrecycling) for more information.

**Q: I want to request a wheelie bin or green glass crate – can I do this now?**

**A:** Once we resume collections, you can request a wheelie bin assessment by calling 04 499 4444. You can get a replacement recycling wheelie bin and clip if yours is lost or stolen. There is a service fee that covers the costs of replacing and delivering the bins. More information can be found at [wellington.govt.nz/rubbishandrecycling](http://wellington.govt.nz/rubbishandrecycling).

**Q: Can I put glass in other containers as my green crate is full?**

**A:** No, the WCC green crate is designed specifically to hold a certain weight for the health and safety of our recycling collectors. Any other crates may be too heavy, not have handles, or in the case of cardboard, may break and cause a hazard with broken glass.

For the safety of the collectors, please only fill your glass crate to the level of the lip, any backlog will be cleared in subsequent collections.

**Q: What is WCC planning to do differently in the future to be prepared for a pandemic?**

**A:** Our approach has followed the WCC's pandemic plan with regards to recycling. It would be our intention, in the event of a future pandemic, to follow the guidelines in the plan.

### **LEVEL 3**

**Q: Is delivery of recycling bags going to happen at Level 3 as well?**

**A:** Yes, delivery of free packs of 52 recycling bags will resume at the same time we start collections on Tuesday 12 May – distribution is estimated to take 6 weeks.

**Q: Are you sure there is nowhere to stockpile recycling? What options did you look at?**

**A:** There is no available storage to stockpile recycling. The sorting facility is designed to only process recycling with very limited outside space to store baled sorted materials prior to sale; there is no appropriate space at the sorting plant to hold unsorted recycling.

Wellington City Council does not have access to any storage capacity to store 6 weeks of recycling.

**Q: If Level 3 goes on a while are you looking into other options for handling the recycling?**

**A:** At this stage, the recycling sorting facility is due to open at Level 2. This operation cannot achieve the physical distancing requirements of Level 3. However, we will continue to review the situation and work with Oji (sorter) if Level 3 is prolonged.

**Q: Why does each council appear to have a different policy around recycling?**

**A:** Some councils have more automated recycling systems which means they may be able to carry on collections and sorting processes. Other systems have more hand-sorting of their recycling, so these workers may be at risk from items infected with the coronavirus.

Recycling is seen as an essential service, which means recyclers may continue their services, but worker safety is paramount, so depending on the systems in place, there are different levels of service around New Zealand.

In Wellington, both our collections and sorting require a large amount of manual interaction - both parts of the collection (particularly glass) and all of the sorting of our recyclables is manual, and involves people handling potentially virus-carrying materials.

**Q: What are other Councils (e.g. the Hutt) doing differently? Can't we send our recycling to another plant?**

**A:** The nearest processing plants that are open are in Masterton or in Palmerston North. These plants have been designed to deal with the volumes of recycling from their own catchments, and will not have additional capacity to take Wellington's recycling.

**Q: Why is stockpiling not recommended now?**

**A:** Stockpiling is undesirable because:

- Overtime it can become a health hazard, so if you store anything, please wash it thoroughly.
- Many residents do not have capacity to store recycling long term.
- Once the alert levels reduce, the recycling system may be unable to cope with large amounts of stockpiled recyclables.

**Q: Why did the Council tell us to stockpile originally?**

**A:** This pandemic is a first for us all and we only had a couple of days to prepare for the lockdown, similar to many other essential services. We did the best we could with the advice given to us and believed that stockpiling recycling was the best option at the time. In normal times, our focus is on waste minimisation and recycling, so this is difficult for all of us. But these aren't normal times. Our priority is the safety of our staff and the public.