

Information for the waste and recycling industry

The NSW Government is working closely with the waste and recycling industry and councils to ensure critical waste services continue.

This is a developing situation and the response taken by the NSW Government to COVID-19 may change over time.

The risk of transmission of COVID-19 when handling waste is low. Waste handling should continue using safe routine procedures.

Essential waste services continue

Public health orders have been issued to protect the community and reduce the spread of COVID-19 infection. Despite public health orders listing restrictions to activities and places that are closed, the waste and recycling industry provides an important service for the community and businesses.

You can still go to work in the waste and recycling industry if you cannot work from home.

Workers can continue to travel for the purposes of work. You may wish to carry identification, wear a uniform or carry a letter from your employer to assist with COVID-19 compliance checks.

A list of public health orders currently in force is at legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/. The list will be updated progressively.

Worker health and safety

Under the model work health and safety laws, employers must have measures in place to eliminate or manage risks arising from COVID-19.

Measures to reduce risk include providing workers with appropriate personal protective equipment such as gloves and eye protection, and information and training on how and why they are required to use them.

While SafeWork NSW advises that employers may not be able to eliminate the risk of workers contracting COVID-19 while carrying out work, they must do all that is reasonably practicable to minimise that risk. Operators should keep up to date with the latest COVID-19 information and advice from SafeWork NSW to ensure that any action taken is appropriate.

Further information on worker health and safety can be found at safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/Coronavirus-advice-and-guidance-for-NSW-workplaces/faqs.

Disposal of household waste

Waste items from people in isolation with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 in non-healthcare facilities, such as homes and other lodgings, should be placed in the red-lidded rubbish bin.

Advice for people in isolation is as follows:

- Dispose of all used personal care items such as tissues, disposable masks and gloves in a rubbish bin that's lined with a plastic bag.
- When the bin is three-quarters full, tie-off the plastic bag to prevent spillage of the contents. Avoid touching the inside of the bag and dispose of the bag into the general household red-lidded rubbish bin.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser if your hands are not visibly dirty.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Further information on the disposal of household waste can be found at health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/factsheets/Pages/advice-for-confirmed.aspx.

Disposal of clinical waste

Waste generated from clinical settings such as hospitals, nursing homes or mobile clinics, must be



stored and processed as per usual. This includes clinical waste, cytotoxic waste, pharmaceutical, drug or medicine waste, and sharps waste.

If waste managers and operators who transport, store, treat or dispose of clinical and related waste are unsure, they should refer to the following NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) advice:

- Schedule 1 of the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997* for licensing requirements
- Part 11 of the *Protection of the Environment Operations (Waste) Regulation 2014* for requirements relating to the storage, transport and disposal of clinical waste.

Further information on the disposal of clinical waste can be found at epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/waste/industrial-waste/clinical-and-related-waste.

Retail waste disposal

The NSW Government has allowed for waste disposal from retail premises at any time, under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment (COVID-19 Development – Extended Operation) Order 2020*.

The Government is working with councils to support communities across the state in response to COVID-19. This includes making these orders to allow for development to be carried out without the normal planning approval in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of everyone.

The list of orders currently in force is at planningportal.nsw.gov.au/Orders, and will be updated progressively.

Interstate transport of waste

The NSW Government is continuing to work with the transport industry to ensure uninterrupted movement of goods and other materials across state borders. NSW has not imposed any state-based restrictions on the movement of waste.

To slow the spread of COVID-19, the Queensland Government has tightened restrictions on entry into Queensland.

These restrictions provide for the continuation of essential goods and services. Transporters can apply for an entry pass into Queensland at qld.gov.au/border-pass.

Regulations for tracking waste out of NSW or overseas still apply. Further information can be found at epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/waste/tracking-transporting-hazardous-waste/tracking-waste-out-nsw.



Business continuity plans

Operators responsible for providing waste and recycling collection services and facilities should have a business continuity plan in place. Plans should include the priority responsibilities of storing, transporting and disposing of waste appropriately, as well as measures to continue essential waste services like kerbside collection.

Plans should be assessed and revised to account for changing circumstances, such as reduced staff numbers or the loss of key personnel, with focus given to high-risk activities.

Licence holders and other entities regulated by the EPA should also have environmental risk management procedures in place to assist in minimising risks to the environment and human health and meet regulatory requirements. They must continue to immediately notify the EPA of pollution incidents and compliance issues.

Operators should maintain good communications with clients and the EPA, particularly around any predicted service disruptions.

Where social distancing requires the extension of operating hours, waste operators should contact the EPA for further assistance. If you would like to discuss your circumstances, please call the Environment Line on 131 555.

Key contacts

Service NSW - for information and advice for NSW businesses go to service.nsw.gov.au.

Health - follow the COVID-19 health advice at NSW Health at health.nsw.gov.au.

Worker health and safety - follow SafeWork NSW advice at safework.nsw.gov.au.

Waste - for information about transport and disposal of waste visit epa.nsw.gov.au or call the Environment Line on 131 555.

Frequently asked questions

Can I still go to work?

Yes. You can still go to work in the waste and recycling industry if you cannot work from home.

Is COVID-19 waste treated separately or as clinical waste?

As part of its COVID-19 advice for households, NSW Health is informing residents to place all used disposable gloves, surgical masks and other contaminated items in a lined waste bin before disposing of them with other household waste. This waste should be processed by waste operators as usual.

Do I need to carry a letter (or similar) from my company saying I am an essential worker?

You may wish to carry identification or wear a uniform to assist with COVID-19 compliance checks.

Can I travel within NSW for work?

Yes. People working in the waste industry can continue to travel within NSW for the purposes of work.

Should a waste facility be closed to the general public?

Going to a waste facility to dispose of household waste constitutes a 'reasonable excuse' that permits someone to lawfully leave their home under the public health order.

Anyone visiting a waste facility should maintain social distancing of at least 1.5 metres from others and practise good hygiene before and after returning. Anyone working in the waste industry should stay home if they feel unwell.

For the latest up to date information about COVID-19, visit NSW Health at health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/diseases/Pages/coronavirus.aspx or Australian Government Health at

health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert.

Can I access Return and Earn?

Many over the counter collection points are closed but Return and Earn machines are still operating and can be accessed for returns if they are at supermarkets or in locations that can be accessed under the public health orders currently in force.

Before leaving home, people should check the Return and Earn website for opening hours at returnandearn.org.au.

Can I still dispose of household chemicals?

The safe way to dispose of potentially hazardous household chemicals is at a Household Chemical CleanOut event or Community Recycling Centre (CRC).

Most Community Recycling Centres (CRC) remain open. Details on locations and opening hours can be found at epa.nsw.gov.au. Anyone visiting a waste facility should maintain social distancing of at least 1.5 metres from others, practice good hygiene before and after returning, and to stay home if they feel unwell.

Chemical CleanOut events have been cancelled until the end of May 2020. Updates are available at cleanout.com.au.

Is the NSW Government considering delaying non-critical reforms, such as the 20-Year Waste Strategy and Plastics Plan?

The 20-Year Waste Strategy issues paper and NSW Plastics Plan discussion paper are currently out for consultation, and we are very interested in hearing views of the community and industry.



The consultation briefings and round tables are now being held as online forums, so this work can continue.

Consultation on these important reforms closes on 8 May 2020.

Is recycling considered an essential service?

The National Cabinet (which consists of the states and territories as well as the Commonwealth) has issued a range of national baseline restrictions for social distancing and business operations, based on advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC). These are enacted individually and independently by states and territories.

The NSW Government has issued public health orders that give effect to the national requirement to define non-essential and/or restricted activities and services.

Unless specifically identified in the public health orders, other business continues from an operational, consent, and licensing perspective, subject to social distancing requirements.

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