

COVID-19 Second Wave Planning – Taking a Phased Approach

October 2020



Status of this Submission

This Submission has been prepared through the Municipal Waste Advisory Council (MWAC) for the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA). MWAC is a standing committee of WALGA, with delegated authority to represent the Association in all matters relating to solid waste management. MWAC's membership includes the major Regional Councils (waste management) as well as a number of Local Government representatives. This makes MWAC a unique forum through which all the major Local Government waste management organisations cooperate.

This Submission therefore represents the consolidated view of Western Australian Local Government. However, individual Local Governments and Regional Councils may have views that differ from the positions taken here.

This document was endorsed by the Municipal Waste Advisory Council at its meeting on Wednesday 28 October 2020.

Background

The intent of this document is to outline the key actions that would be needed for Local Government Waste Services in the event of a second wave of COVID-19 in Western Australia (or future event). The phases that are identified in this document are broadly aligned to those that occurred in the WA context, however a complete lock down is also contemplated. It is also worth noting that due to the size of the State, if intra-state movement were limited then different areas could be effected differently. Appendix 1 includes a summary of information previously documented by WALGA.

In developing the document, considerations include the need to ensure that the community can dispose of waste generated in an effective and efficient way which minimises the risk of COVID-19 transmission and facilitates adherence to Government Direction. Waste is an essential service, however the specific elements of the waste services which are required at all times needs further discussion. If this consistent approach is to work there will need to be widespread adoption – or a Government requirement – because if one site is open when others are closed it is likely to be overwhelmed.

Planning for Local Government Services during an Emergency Event

| Stage of Emergency | Local Government Waste Services |
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| <p>Complete Lock Down Characteristics: Significant community transmission and multiple outbreaks across wider geographic area.</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Limited movement of people between geographic areas (within and outside metropolitan area, including regional travel restrictions)Severely restricted community movement – shopping, exercise, emergency only | <p>Kerbside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside – Continue as normal, unless concerns about ability of service provider to collect.</p> <p>Drop off Reuse shops closed Public drop off – closed Household Hazardous Waste drop off – closed</p> <p>Note</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Although closed, there is the potential for it to be open by appointment, for urgent waste disposal.For some Local Governments drop off is the only waste disposal option for residents (or a portion of residents), for these Local Governments they would need to continue |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social distancing / masks for anyone outside • Work from home, unless absolutely essential • Non-essential businesses close • Take away only from restaurants /café | <p>providing a drop off option, with increased precaution for workers (if present at the site).</p> <p>Container Deposit Scheme Bag drop, in certain shops (e.g. charity shops) are likely to be impacted.</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations Waste management services workers need to have permits to cross borders / boundaries. Workers will need to have social distancing and wear masks, ensure that exposure risks are minimised – for example no congregating of workers, same people working together, split shifts etc. to make sure if one section of the workforce falls sick or are required to self-isolate, there are sufficient workers to cover those shifts. PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Have labour hire company or casual workforce on standby to provide labour if insufficient workers due to sickness and self-isolation requirements. Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system. Workers should be encouraged to self-isolate and get tested if they are feeling unwell. Identify workers who are at high risk of serious illness/death if they contract COVID-19. Seek advice on alternative work arrangements.</p> |
| <p>Phase 1 Characteristics: Community transmission, across a range of geographic areas.</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited movement of people between geographic areas (within and outside metropolitan area, including regional travel restrictions) • Social distancing in public spaces • Limited number of people gathering • Work from home if you can • Non-essential businesses close • Take away only from restaurants /cafés | <p>Kerbside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside – Continue as normal, unless concerns about ability of service provider.</p> <p>Drop off Reuse shops closed Public drop off – open Household Hazardous Waste drop off – open</p> <p>Container Deposit Scheme Bag drop, in certain shops (e.g. charity shops) are likely to be impacted.</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations Waste management services workers need to have permits to cross borders / boundaries. Workers will need to have social distancing and wear masks, ensure that exposure risks are minimised – for example no congregating of workers, same people working together, split shifts etc. to make sure if one section of the workforce falls sick or are required to self-isolate, there are sufficient workers to cover those shifts. PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Have labour hire company or casual workforce on standby to provide labour if insufficient workers due to sickness and self-isolation requirements.</p> |

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| | <p>Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system. Workers should be encouraged to self-isolate and get tested if they are feeling unwell. Identify workers who are at high risk of serious illness/death if they contract COVID-19. Seek advice on alternative work arrangements.</p> |
| <p>Phase 2 Characteristics: Limited community transmission</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 square metre social distancing • Travel restrictions relaxed across majority of WA • Gatherings allowed – 20 people limit • Café & restaurants open – for food only • COVID Safety plans for businesses | <p>Kerbside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside – Continue as normal, unless concerns about ability of service provider.</p> <p>Drop off <i>Reuse shops closed</i> Public drop off – open Household Hazardous Waste drop off – open</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations Workers will need to have social distancing and wear masks, ensure that exposure risks are minimised – for example no congregating of workers, same people working together, split shifts etc. to make sure if one section of the workforce falls sick or are required to self-isolate, there are sufficient workers to cover those shifts. PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Have labour hire company or casual workforce on standby to provide labour if insufficient workers due to sickness and self-isolation requirements. Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system. Workers should be encouraged to self-isolate and get tested if they are feeling unwell.</p> |
| <p>Phase 3 Characteristics Very limited community transmission</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 square metre social distancing • The number of people at non-work gatherings increased, and additional businesses reopened • Café & restaurants open for dine in, with restrictions • COVID Safety plans for businesses | <p>Kerbside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Drop off Reuse shops – open Public drop off – open Household Hazardous Waste drop off – open</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations Workers will need to have social distancing, ensure that exposure risks are minimised – for example no congregating of workers, same people working together, split shifts etc. to make sure if one section of the workforce falls sick or are required to self-isolate, there are sufficient workers to cover those shifts. PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system. Workers should be encouraged to self-isolate and get tested if they are feeling unwell.</p> |

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| <p>Phase 4 Characteristics No reported community transmission</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gatherings allowed based on the 2 square metre social distancing rule only Major venues – 50% capacity | <p>Kerbside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Drop off Reuse shops – open Public drop off – open Household Hazardous Waste drop off – open</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system Workers should take personal leave if unwell and not attend work.</p> |
| <p>Phase 5 Characteristics No community transmission in WA</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal of 2 square meter rule Limits on venue capacity removed | <p>Kerbside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside – Continue as normal</p> <p>Drop off Reuse shops – open Public drop off – open Household Hazardous Waste drop off – open</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system Workers should take personal leave if unwell and not attend work.</p> |
| <p>Phase 6 Characteristics: Low/no community transmission in Australia</p> <p>Restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal of WA hard boarder and travel restrictions in place for remote Aboriginal communities. | <p>Kerbside Continue as normal</p> <p>Vergeside Continue as normal</p> <p>Drop off Continue as normal</p> <p>Communications – community facing Wash hands after you take the bin in /out Reduction of waste messaging Do not put tissues in the recycling bin</p> <p>Worker considerations PPE and hand sanitiser must be provided to workers. Increase hygiene requirements – frequency of hand washing if not wearing PPE. Cashless system Workers should take personal leave if unwell and not attend work.</p> |

Risk of transmission relating to Waste Services

| Services | Risk | Likelihood of occurrence | Mitigation |
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| Kerbside | Transmission of virus from bin to bin, if workers are touching multiple bins during the collection process | Low – feedback from Dept of Health indicated that bin to bin transmission was relatively low likelihood of occurring and straightforward to mitigate | Community messaging – wash hands after taking the bin out. |
| | People with the virus at home placing items which have the virus on them (e.g. tissues etc) in the waste, recycling, GO or FOGO bin | High – material is likely to be placed in the bin that does carry the virus, however there are a range of mitigation options and current procedures which reduce the risk. | Community messaging – don't put tissues in your recycling bin. Double bag your waste. Operational – No one is touching the material in the bin. Recycling, GO or FOGO sorting workers already wearing full PPE, as nasty stuff frequently in the waste. |
| Vergeside | People going through the piles of waste on the verge, which may have the virus on them | Medium/low – feedback from Dept of Health indicated that transmission was relatively low likelihood of occurring and straightforward to mitigate | Community messaging / enforcement – do not go through the bulk verge collection material. |
| Drop off | Virus infected waste being in contact with workers – directly or indirectly | Medium – waste could be infected with the virus. | Community messaging – if you have the virus double bag your waste. Operational – PPE for those working closely with waste. Ensure that the filters on vehicles sufficient. Limit the number of cars allowed on site at any one time to allow social distancing – ensure additional staff to undertake traffic control. |
| All | Worker concern regarding the potential impact of COVID. If an employee contracts COVID at work, the employer could be at risk of receiving a workers' compensation claim. | High – workers are rightly concerned about any potential impact of COVID through exposure in their workplace. | Ensure that workers have the most contemporary health advice from the Department of Health. Ensure workers have relevant PPE and training in how to use the PPE. Check in regularly with workers to understand any concerns or facilitate improvements to how work is being undertaken. |

Outbreak planning

Usually want to divert as much waste as possible from landfill however, in outbreak in tower block for example, not an option. Therefore a system needs to be in place to ensure the waste is handled appropriately:

- Instruct residents, double bag waste, collected daily from front door – by person with full PPE and placed in waste bin
- For domestic waste, engage with Local Government who is, or contracts, the service provider to provide additional waste bins or more frequent services

- Minimise any waste collection driver contact with the Bins or waste (e.g. side lift truck, or ensure workers have face mask / hand sanitiser if they are touching the bins.)

Appendix 1: Summary Information

Waste Collection – Kerbside

Contamination of household bins – advice from the Department of Health PHEOC as follows:

It is possible that someone with COVID-19 may contaminate the surface of a bin and this could lead to transmission onto the next person to touch the bin. The bin is acting as a fomite- i.e. an inanimate object which can spread a pathogen on when touched. The risk of this occurring is no higher than any other object that people may touch throughout the course of their day. Thus, the risk mitigation strategy for this occurrence is to ensure that all staff handling bins wear gloves and wash their hands effectively after handling bins and regularly throughout the course of the day. It may also be an idea for Local Governments to remind consumers to wash their hands regularly throughout the day, including when handling bins.

Collection Vehicles – a large proportion of waste collection vehicles, for kerbside collections, are side arm trucks. This means that a person does not physically touch the bin, instead the side arm of the truck collects the bin. The content of the bin are tipped into the sealed body of the truck. This system is set up to minimise any contact between the driver and the bin or its contents, thereby minimising risk.

For those organisations using rear lift trucks, where workers are required to manoeuvre bins to be picked up by the trucks, it is recommended that the workers follow the Department of Health advice regarding hygiene. The Local Government may also want to encourage residents to wash their hands after handling bins. For workers sharing vehicles – it is suggested that waste collection vehicles are thoroughly sanitised between shifts.

Collection / Processing Contracts - Local Governments who have outsourced collection may need to consider some flexibility in their contracts, should the workforce undertaking collections be severely impacted. For example, the collection time (earlier or later) and the destination of the material. In regard to destination it may be quicker for a vehicle to go to another landfill / transfer station than the one contracted. The main message is, consider this as an option and Local Government discuss this with your contractors.

Waste Facilities

Sharing vehicles

As for collection workers, it is suggested that vehicles are thoroughly sanitised between shifts/users. This can include forklifts, front end loaders and compactors.

Material Recovery Facilities

The workers at these facilities wear full PPE – masks, glasses and gloves – as the nature and condition of the material received at these facilities is also quite variable and Material Recovery Facilities do have issues with the type of material they receive at times (for example nappies and sharps).

Composting facilities

At composting facilities, for example processing FOGO, workers would wear full PPE, practice good hygiene and utilise litter pick grabs to remove all contamination. That means tissues can continue to be disposed of in the FOGO bin.

Transfer Stations / Drop off centres / Landfills

The current approach used by these facilities is to minimise staff contact with the community who are dropping off recyclables or waste. This includes social distancing processes and additional PPE where appropriate. Most sites have closed Reuse Shops (aka Tip Shops) during this time to minimise any staff contact with the community. Currently, these sites are still open and taking 'self haul' material. Disposing of waste is necessary and people may be taking the opportunity, while self

isolating, to have a good clear out. While transfer stations/drop off centres and landfills can remain open to allow people to dispose of self haul material – while minimising staff exposure – it is encouraged that this occur, rather than the material remaining in people's homes or being illegally disposed of. However, if Government was to put in place more stringent recommendations regarding people not leaving their homes – except to get essentials – then it is suggested that transfer stations/drop off centres / landfills close their self haul facilities. In this case the community would be encouraged to store material at home until such time as the restrictions were lifted.

Where the community has a clear pathway to dispose of the waste that they are usually generating (through kerbside / verge collection) then the restriction on self haul should not prove too onerous. If these services are not in place in a Local Government – or are only in place for a proportion of the population – there is a rationale for self haul to remain in operation, as it is the only waste disposal option for the community. Depending on the size of the community being serviced, arrangements could be put in place for pre-booking of waste drop off and electronic transactions.

Cash handling

It is suggested that sites minimise cash handling from an Occupational Health and Safety point of view. If your Local Government has not yet instituted a 'no cash' policy then it is suggested that this be referred to those responsible for dealing with COVID-19 issues within your Local Government and a whole of organisation policy be put in place.

Staffing

Considering options to reduce risks, there could be the option for multiple shifts, with smaller numbers of staff, as way of social distancing and reducing risk.