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'This is a revenue issue for Metro Vancouver' 4

It's getting worse each year. It's putting our entire solid- waste management plan in jeopardy. PAUL HENDERSON GENERAL MANAGER, SOLID WASTE SERVICES, METRO VANCOUVER

"Watch out, it's slippery," Hackett warned of the black goo formed from water and squished garbage on the floor.



JENELLE SCHNEIDER/ PNG

Progressive Waste Solutions, a privately owned company in Abbotsford that carries waste from Metro Vancouver to Sumas, Wash., was issued \$ 37,854 in fines last year by Metro Vancouver.

As vehicles arrive at the station, a spotter asked the drivers what they are carrying in hopes of diverting any loads of banned items. Once they continued into the building and backed up for unloading, Hackett positioned herself about three metres away for safety reasons wearing a white hard hat and yellow vest.

Some are zero- tolerance "prohibited items," such as batteries, electronics, gypsum drywall, paint and tires; even one item results in a minimum \$ 50 fine.

The other category is for "banned items," including corrugated cardboard, recyclable paper, green waste, glass and metal containers, plastics, and beverage containers except for milk cartons. Where these items represent more than five per cent of the load by volume the fine is 50 per cent of the tipping fee — and that can be substantial.

Hackett writes a Super Save Disposal truck a fine for 50 per cent of its \$ 876.96 tipping fee for a cardboard violation.

Nearby, when three men start unloading trash that includes cardboard, she is quick to cut them off, saying that it can be dropped off for recycling for free elsewhere on the 2.6- hectare site and that if they put it back in the truck they'll avoid a fine.

For every load fined, recyclable items in about three other loads are removed by the hauler and not subject to fines.

Minutes later, another man drops off wood that exceeds 2.5 metres, a length that can play havoc with the compactor. He puts it back on the pickup to avoid a \$ 50 fine. In 2015, Metro Vancouver will implement a ban on the disposal of clean wood not contaminated by paints, stains or glues.

Occasionally, trash haulers, especially individuals with residential trash, can become angry and verbally abusive, to the point they are told not to return until setting up a meeting to prove they have their emotions under control.

"Sometimes it's the customers who get banned," Hackett confirmed.

She makes her determinations based largely on what she sees, although her ears have become attuned to the sound of recyclable bottles or cans from inside a black garbage bag.

"I can hear them ' ting, ting, ting,'" she said.

Metro Vancouver's latest waste composition report in 2013 found that compostable organics comprised 36.2 per cent of trash, followed by plastics at 14.4 per cent, and paper at 13.6 per cent, which suggests that the number of fines would be much higher if inspectors could see everything in a load.

In Nova Scotia, some municipalities have mandated the use of only clear garbage bags for residences for just that reason.

While McRae said Northwest takes all its waste to facilities within Metro Vancouver, an increasing number of waste companies are choosing to haul outside the region to private waste- transfer stations in Abbotsford, where their trash is transferred to rail facilities in Sumas, Wash., and hauled to a private landfill in the arid Columbia River region.

These companies are drawn mainly by cheaper tipping fees — an estimated \$ 70 a tonne in Abbotsford versus \$ 108 in Metro Vancouver. In the process, they also skirt the surcharge fines designed to encourage recycling, Metro Vancouver asserts.

BFI district manager Grant Hankins confirmed that his company purchased an existing waste transfer station in 2010.

"We're not doing anything illegal," he said, noting that the facility is used by haulers working close enough to make the distance economically feasible. "This is a revenue issue for Metro Vancouver, a hidden tax that they want their hands and controls on."

The BFI/ Progressive waste-transfer facility is located on Industrial Avenue, just west of Highway 11 near the border, while Chilliwack- based First Class Waste/ Alpine Valley Disposal has an operation nearby on Coutts Way.

As for the fines, Hankins said: "We collect hundreds of bins per day. We rely on our customers to be as diligent as possible, to separate recyclables from the waste stream. We can't police it. There's no way to see inside a black bag or the bottom of a bin. And it's impossible to go back and find the offending customer."

Metro Vancouver estimates about 160,000 tonnes of waste will be shipped south through Abbotsford into Washington in 2014 — about 100,000 tonnes of that, or 10,000 truck loads, from Metro Vancouver, up from 50,000 tonnes in 2012. This represents about 20 per cent of the commercial trash collected in the region this year and

a loss of about \$ 11 million in tipping fees, the region estimates.

"It's getting worse each year," Henderson said. "It's putting our entire solid- waste management plan in jeopardy."

Critics counter that Metro Vancouver wants a monopoly to ensure enough waste stays in the region to feed a planned \$ 470- million waste- to- energy project.

Waste Management spokesperson Robin Freedman said her company is the region's largest hauler, so it's understandable they have more fines. Waste Management is making progress (the company had fines of \$ 95,915 in 2012) and continues to "work with our drivers to educate them about contamination and they, in turn, work to educate our customers."

The list of prohibited items has grown steadily since 1997, and also includes paint, gypsum, oil, tires, metal appliances, mattresses, plastic, paper, and blue- box recyclables, with organics expected to be included in 2015.

Inspections are conducted on about 20 per cent of loads arriving at solid- waste facilities.

Metro Vancouver has been waiting since last October for Environment Minister Mary Polak to approve Bylaw 280, which would require that garbage generated in Metro Vancouver be processed at regional facilities.

Paul Richard, chair of environmental protection technology at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, has written Polak in support of the bylaw, warning that "the full integrity of the recycling system, from source separation, producer responsibility, organics collection, and other initiatives" stands to be compromised.

McRae opposes Bylaw 280, wants to open a "mixed- waste-material recovery facility" to process waste from the region, and has suggested that the bylaw could be challenged in the courts if endorsed by the province.

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