
MEMORANDUM

WMPSC-C 28-2021

Subject: Recycling Matters – Curbside Recognition Audits

Date: Monday, August 30, 2021

To: Waste Management Planning Steering Committee

From: Lucy McGovern, Manager, Waste Management Services

In 2012, Niagara Region initiated a Gold Star recycling rewards program with a goal to improve the quantity and quality of the recyclable materials collected through the Region's curbside collection program. The Gold Star program is carried out when staffing resources are available. Since the program began in 2012, over 4,300 Niagara households have had curbside visual recycling audits. Of these, 793 households (18%) have been rewarded with a Gold Star recycling box. In 2019, Niagara Region initiated a new education campaign called *Recycling Matters*, and in the fall of 2021, the Gold Star recycling rewards program will again commence as part of the *Recycling Matters* education and awareness campaign.

Background

The material placed in recycling boxes across Niagara can often be contaminated with materials that are either not recyclable, or not properly prepared for recycling collection and processing. Although these items may be set out for collection with the best of intentions, contaminated or improperly prepared recyclables cause a number of processing challenges at the Region's Recycling Centre, which can reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of the recycling process. This ultimately decreases the quality of the sorted recyclables; can increase taxpayer costs to manage the material; and can result in more waste destined for landfill.

The Gold Star recycling rewards program will support improved education and awareness regarding recycling preparation practices and the reduction of contamination. Additionally, the visual curbside audits encourages continued participation in the Region's recycling program and thanks residents who have successfully sorted their recyclables with a new Blue Box identifying them as Gold Star Recyclers.

Key Messages

- Sorting and preparing your recyclable materials properly matters
- The improper sorting and preparation of recyclables increases costs to you as a taxpayer
- Revenue from the sale of successfully sorted recyclables helps offset taxpayer costs of Niagara's waste management programs
- Sorting and preparing recyclables properly ensures materials can be recycled and extends the life of our landfills

Curbside Visual Audits and Gold Star Recycler Rewards

In the fall of 2021, visual curbside audits of recyclables will take place at approximately 600 low-density residential homes in each municipality across Niagara to look for contaminated and improperly prepared recycling materials. Staff will return to these households weekly, over three consecutive weeks, until successful sorting results are achieved. Unacceptable materials and highly contaminated recycling boxes observed during the visual curbside audits will be tagged as uncollectable. Educational *Recycling Matters* door hangers will be used to support sorting and preparation practices for residents with mediocre or poor recycling results. If curbside recycling is observed to be completed successfully, residents will be provided with an informative door hanger thanking them for their cooperation and will be rewarded with a new Gold Star Blue Box.

Auditors will look for the following proper recycling practices while conducting curbside visual audits:

- Use of the Blue Box, Grey Box and the Green Bin
- No mixing of Blue and Grey recyclable materials together
- Plastic bags and stretchy plastic outer-wrap is stuffed into one plastic bag and placed in the Grey Box
- Only empty containers and rigid plastic packaging are placed in the Blue Box
- Juice/milk cartons and juice boxes are placed in the Blue Box
- Only the plastic lids from take-out coffee and soft drink cups are placed in the Blue Box and the take-out cups themselves are not in either recycling box
- Empty aerosol cans and empty paint cans are placed in the Blue Box with lids removed; and
- No garbage observed in either the Blue or Grey Box

Door hangers recognizing and thanking successful sorters will include the option for residents to be profiled on Niagara Region's social media accounts with their new 'Gold Star Recycler' box. Promotional door hangers will direct residents to learn more about recycling at www.niagararegion.ca/waste. See Appendix 1.

Next Steps

Curbside visual audits will occur throughout September and October 2021. Staff will report on the audit results in the first quarter of 2022.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Lucy McGovern
Manager, Waste Management Services

Appendices

Appendix A – Thank You Door Hanger