
MEMORANDUM**PWC-C 14-2020**

Subject: Overview of the Communications Strategy and Public Education Campaign for the Collection Service Level Changes

Date: Tuesday, June 16, 2020

To: Public Works Committee

From: Susan McPetrie, Waste Management Services Advisor

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an overview of the public education campaign that has been developed to promote and raise awareness of the collection service level changes that will occur with the commencement of the new waste collection contracts on October 19, 2020 (see Appendix A). Campaign implementation begins in June and will continue until November 2020. After completion of the campaign, program maintenance and support will occur as part of the annual divisional social marketing and outreach strategy.

Campaign Objectives

As outlined in WMPSC-C 21-2020, Niagara Region has engaged the services of Armstrong Strategy Group (ASG), through a competitive RFP process, to develop and deliver a comprehensive and multi-faceted public education campaign that will build public knowledge and understanding of the service level changes that were approved by Council on October 17, 2019 (PW 61-2019). The key objectives of the campaign are to:

- Advise residents and businesses of when changes start and how their waste collection services will be affected;
- Increase participation in Regional diversion programs, including addressing current barriers and educating on proper preparation of materials;
- Provide information on how to access tools available to facilitate participation, including obtaining a Green Bin, applying for waste exemptions, such as weekly diaper collection, and accessing the new online collection calendar and mobile app;

- Educate residents about illegal dumping and proper disposal methods, including encouragement of the reporting of illegal dumping and raising awareness of the Region's reward program for reporting.

Implementation Phases

The campaign has been designed with three implementation phases:

Phase 1: The Pre-Change Campaign – June to September 20, 2020

The focus of this phase is on educating the public about the upcoming changes, how they will impact different sectors in Niagara and why the changes are being made.

Phase 2: The Build-Up - September 21 to October 19, 2020

This phase will consist of a ramp-up in outreach and communication activities in the month before the waste collection changes begin. In addition to providing information on the changes, messaging will encourage residents to pick up a Green Bin, download the collection calendar mobile app currently in development, and get on board with every-other-week garbage collection and waste diversion practices.

Phase 3: The Launch and Post-Launch - October 20 – November

The final phase of the campaign will feature messages focusing on compliance and illegal dumping, while at the same time recognizing and expressing appreciation to residents and businesses that have embraced and adapted to the changes.

Outreach and Engagement Tactics

As part of the communications strategy, ASG has identified diverse tactics for engaging with a broad range of target audiences throughout Niagara Region. The following list includes examples of key communications tactics that will be employed:

- Postcards to low density residential properties;
- Letters to multi-residential properties and businesses;
- Social media campaign;
- Campaign webpage on Niagara Region's website;
- Engagement with business sector through webinars, video meetings;
- New vehicle wrap with campaign messaging on waste collection vehicles;

- Media releases, media conferences and a Waste Reduction Week photo-op;
- Video series on topics including tips to reduce waste and using the Green Bin;
- Public service announcements;
- Dedicated message e-blast to Niagara Chamber of Commerce;
- Engagement with Local Area Municipality councils and staff;
- Newspaper advertising;
- Journalist ride-along of collection process, facility tours;
- Illegal dumping awareness campaign; and
- On-going monitoring and response to public inquiries and feedback through social media, the Waste Info-Line and Niagara Region's website.

The onset of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) presents a challenge to carrying out the type of in-person engagement activities that would typically play a key role in public outreach. With closures, physical distancing requirements, and event cancellations, the communications strategy has been adapted to shift emphasis to activities that do not require person-to-person contact. As an example of an adjusted tactic, unstaffed booths can be set-up with pop-up banners and take-away postcards at businesses that are open (i.e. grocery stores, garden centres, etc.), rather than scheduling Waste Management interns to attend local community activities. ASG and Waste Management staff will continue to look for opportunities for engagement as they arise with the evolving COVID-19 situation.

Key Messages

There are three (3) key messages that will be used throughout the campaign. These overarching messages can also be customized into sub-messages for use with specific audiences and applications.

1. Changes are coming.

This message comprises the educational component of the campaign. This theme is connected to messages providing information including the date of the new contract, the substance of the changes, the rationale behind them and how Niagara Region's residential and business sectors will be affected.

Examples of sub-messages are:

- Starting October 19, your garbage will be collected every-other-week. Blue and Grey Boxes and the Green Bin will continue to be collected weekly.

- Changes are coming. Starting October 19, there will be no curbside collection of scrap metal or white goods (such as stoves, refrigerators, dishwashers).

2. It's worth the effort.

This message acknowledges that the changes may require effort on the part of residents and businesses to sort and dispose of materials properly, while emphasizing the value of this effort. It will draw on the rationale for the changes, including the benefits and best practices to support and encourage participation.

Examples of sub-messages are:

- Niagara has one of the most comprehensive recycling programs in the province. Help us make it even better! It's worth the effort.
- Properly preparing and sorting your waste means more of it can be recycled or composted. It's worth the effort.

3. We all need to do our share.

This message has multiple purposes. First, it conveys that residents and businesses have a part to play in promoting waste diversion. Secondly, it positively conveys that the effort put into this change will require have a beneficial effect.

Examples of sub-messages are:

- You can do your share to deal with food waste by putting yours in the Green Bin.
- Homeowners in Niagara are recycling more than the provincial average. Businesses need to do their part, too. We all need to do our share.
- Every bit of effort helps reduce climate change. We all need to do our share.

Slogan and Branding

ASG has designed a new slogan and branding for the campaign that has the flexibility and longevity to be used and adapted beyond the launch of the new collection contract. The new slogan "Box it. Bin it. Sort it." promotes diversion and ties in with the new visual branding, which includes a graphic of a recycling container with the three curbside diversion streams represented (see Appendix B for sample). The new slogan and branding unify the campaign messaging and materials, and will help raise public awareness that collection services are changing.

Campaign Conclusion

Despite the challenges posed by the timing of this campaign during a pandemic, all efforts are being taken to deliver an extensive and robust public education campaign, which ensures that residents and business are well-informed of the service level changes that will begin on October 19, 2020.

At the conclusion of the campaign, ASG will provide a report to Niagara Region that will assess the effectiveness of the campaign and provide recommendations for ongoing communication. This material will be presented to the Waste Management Planning Steering Committee by the end of 2020.

Additional Efforts to Support Residents

Concurrent with the public education campaign, Niagara Region staff are working with Recollect Systems Inc. to release an online collection calendar and mobile app. The online calendar will be integrated directly into Niagara Region's existing Waste Management web page. Residents will be able to search for an address and view an online calendar with easily recognizable graphics to quickly identify collection day for each material stream. The calendar can be printed, viewed on-line, or even embedded into a users' personal calendar.

Significant new features for residents include:

- Access to collection day and other information through the voice assistant on Amazon Alexa on all enabled devices; and
- Ability to sign up to receive a customized reminder to set-out waste material, via text, email or phone call, at a set time each week.

The mobile app and calendar also function as an additional communication tool by staff. Residents who sign up for reminders or who access the calendar on-line will see targeted educational messaging. For example, Niagara Region can design brief, focused messages to be included during specific campaigns (e.g. related to illegal dumping). In the case of delayed collection (e.g. due to weather related issues), residents living in the affected neighbourhood(s) who have signed up for the service will receive notification about the delays, as well as updated set-out instructions if applicable. It is anticipated that the ability for Regional staff to send this targeted messaging will reduce the need to call the Waste Info Line, especially during time periods with extra set-out, such as Branch and Leaf and Yard Waste weeks.

The mobile app and calendar are scheduled for release in July and will be promoted as part of the overall campaign by ASG.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Susan McPetrie
Waste Management Services Advisor

Appendices

Appendix A Summary of Waste Management Service Level Changes

Appendix B Sample of New Branding