



County of Burlington
Office of the Board of County Commissioners
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Eve A. Cullinan, County Administrator

**Board of County
Commissioners**

Felicia Hopson, Director
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Linda A. Hynes
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June 11, 2021

Dear Mayor,

The last several weeks have been incredibly challenging for Burlington County's recycling program and I'd like to provide you with an update about the disruptions and actions that are being taken to remedy the situation.

Like you, we have heard from residents upset about the disruptions. We understand and share their frustrations. A lot of what has happened is beyond our control, but we have taken several responsive actions to assist our recycling vendor to get us back on a more regular collection schedule.

Before I detail those, let me briefly review the cause of the recycling disruptions.

As you've likely heard, we are facing a nationwide shortage of qualified truck drivers and that shortage has impacted our recycling program. Many truck drivers are getting older and retiring, and they're becoming harder to replace due to a lack of interest from younger adults to perform that work. At the same time, demand for drivers has exploded amid the rise in e-commerce and qualified drivers are getting huge offers to leave their current jobs. Some companies are even paying signing bonuses.

The situation became extremely problematic during the last month when our longtime provider, Occupational Training Center, lost several drivers all at once. Since then, OTC has been extremely shorthanded and it is preventing them from collecting on the regular predetermined schedule that everyone has grown accustomed to.

OTC has operated our recycling program for 39 years now. They are a nonprofit organization that specializes in training and employing individuals with disabilities, and we've been proud to partner with them to create a recycling program that is one of New Jersey's best.

You should also be aware that Burlington County is the only county in New Jersey that collects recycling from all 40 of our towns, and, unlike most other counties that collect recycling, Burlington County does not charge towns a fee for the service. We undertake it as a shared service to save our property taxpayers money, and we're proud of the program's outstanding record of dependable service throughout the last four decades.

Right now OTC is facing a Perfect Storm situation, so we're getting them some temporary help until they can recruit and train permanent replacements for the drivers they have lost.

Effective immediately, we are redeploying our own County truck drivers from the Division of Roads and Bridges to be trained to operate OTC recycling trucks to assist with collections. And this training is being expedited so these drivers can begin collections quickly.

We have also entered into a shared service agreement with the Burlington County Bridge Commission that will allow several of the Commission's licensed truck drivers to work recycling collections. OTC has also supplemented its fleet with some additional trucks that are easier to operate so that these additional drivers can be quickly trained and deployed.

These additional drivers are temporary help that we believe should improve collections and provide a stopgap while OTC hires and trains new permanent drivers to replace the ones lost to other employment opportunities.

Unfortunately, the recycling schedule is anticipated to remain fluid for several additional weeks, so we are encouraging residents to continue checking the recycling hotline at 609-267-6889 and the county website, www.co.burlington.nj.us for the latest updates and available schedules. Residents can also download the Recycling Coach app at www.recyclecoach.com or from Google play or Apple store for up-to-date information and to receive notifications about upcoming collection make-up days.

Due to the disruptions in curbside collections, many residents are also taking advantage of the municipal recycling drop-off locations, and we have prioritized collections from those sites so that they remain available for residents.

Many of our municipalities have expanded the hours these sites are open and some have also assisted OTC with curbside collections. We sincerely appreciate those efforts, as well as the cooperation we've received from all of Burlington County's municipalities.

We are grateful for the support we have received from residents. The overwhelming majority of feedback we have received has been understanding and supportive as we ask for their continued patience and flexibility as we look to work through this challenging situation.

Burlington County has a long history of pulling together and working side by side when facing challenges or a crisis. We've witnessed it following hurricanes, fires and floods, and throughout the last year during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are seeing that tradition continue now as we work through this unfortunate situation together.

We appreciate your ongoing support and assistance in communicating these responsive and responsible actions the County is taking to try to address the driver shortfall. If you or any of your constituents has questions or concerns please don't hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Felicia Hopson", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Felicia Hopson, Director, Burlington County Board of County Commissioners