

# HALIFAX

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**Item No. 14.1.2**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**March 20, 2018**

**TO:** Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Original Signed by   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jacques Dubé, Chief Administrative Officer

**DATE:** February 9, 2018

**SUBJECT:** Curbside Collection of Household Medical Waste

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## **ORIGIN**

At the July 18, 2017 meeting of Halifax Regional Council, it was moved by Deputy Mayor Craig, seconded by Councillor Outhit:

“THAT Halifax Regional Council request a staff report that includes research, preferred recommendation and options for the accommodation of residents with medical conditions by allowing additional privacy bags for curbside solid waste collection of household medical waste.”

## **LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY**

Section 335 of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* provides that “The Council may make by-laws respecting solid waste, including, but not limited to, ... (b) regulating the disposal, collection and removal of solid waste; ...”

Section 14.1 of HRM’s *Solid Waste Resource Collection and Disposal By-Law*, S-600, “No person shall place waste from premises other than eligible premises or other waste that is not collectible waste on municipal property for collection or other reason without written permission from the Administrator.”

## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council:

- 1) Direct staff to continue to manage requests for additional privacy bags by encouraging placement of clear bags in garbage cans; and
- 2) Direct staff to seek input from the Accessibility Advisory committee on programs and guidelines with respect to the collection of curbside solid waste.

**BACKGROUND**

The August 2015 rollout of clear bags for garbage included provision for one ‘privacy bag’ per eligible unit on each collection day. The intent of this bag was to contain items that may be considered sensitive in nature, such as personal hygiene items (bathroom waste). To further accommodate concerns of privacy, clear bags may be placed in garbage cans. The contents are not visible to anyone walking by, but may still be inspected by collection staff to ensure compliance.

Staff estimate fewer than 10 inquiries for additional privacy bags were received leading up to implementation of the clear bag program. On discussing the option to use garbage cans, each of those concerns was resolved. Each caller was offered a home visit by Solid Waste staff to assess their circumstances, and only one visit was completed, with the same result. Since 2015 there have been very few requests for additional privacy bags (1 or 2 per year) typically with the same result. Staff continue to offer education and home visits to any resident who calls with concerns.

**What is household medical waste?**

As more people opt to receive treatment and long term care at home, there are different types of waste that can be generated. Patients and families receiving at home care are given directions on how to safely dispose of **general waste** generated from their treatment. A common type of at home care is dialysis. Tubing or bags from dialysis are drained and double bagged for regular garbage collection. Diapers, incontinence pads, masks and gloves also fall under this category of waste which is acceptable for curbside collection and landfill disposal. Sharps (needles) or vials are placed in a secure container and returned to the treating unit, or to a pharmacy. Pharmacy Nova Scotia offers a voluntary-stewardship program where customers can pick-up a **sharps** container from their local pharmacy and return it for proper disposal, free of charge. Customers can also return **unused medications** to their pharmacy for safe disposal<sup>1</sup>.

**Biomedical waste** is governed by Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) Guidelines<sup>2</sup>. Though these guidelines exclude waste generated in a household from being classified as biomedical, in cases where self-care generates yellow bag material, the material is taken directly back to the hospital clinic overseeing treatment. Home care providers are trained on the proper transport and handling of biomedical material to dispose of the material safely and properly. An overview of different waste categories can be seen below in Table 1<sup>3</sup>.

Table 1 - Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings

Waste Category	Colour Code <sup>2, 139</sup>	Examples	Disposal
Anatomical waste	Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tissues, organs, body parts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incineration</li> <li>▪ Must be packaged in a sealed, impervious container that is refrigerated or frozen until disposal</li> <li>▪ Must never be kept longer than one week</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> <https://pans.ns.ca/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.ccme.ca/files/Resources/waste/hazardous/pn\\_1060\\_e.pdf](http://www.ccme.ca/files/Resources/waste/hazardous/pn_1060_e.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Public Health Ontario. May 2012. Best Practices for Environmental Cleaning for Prevention and Control of Infections in All Health Care Settings, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

Waste Category	Colour Code <sup>2, 139</sup>	Examples	Disposal
Microbiologic waste	Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diagnostic specimens, cultures, vaccines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incineration, <i>or</i></li> <li>▪ Treatment that is capable of inactivating spores (e.g., autoclave), then landfill</li> </ul>
Fluid waste	Yellow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drainage collection units and suction container contents, blood, blood products, bloody body fluids and other materials that will release liquid or semi-liquid blood if compressed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sanitary sewer if permitted by municipal bylaws, <i>or</i></li> <li>▪ Incineration, <i>or</i></li> <li>▪ Treatment that is capable of inactivating spores (e.g., autoclave), then landfill</li> </ul>
Sharps	Yellow <i>or</i> Red if incinerated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Needles, syringes, lancets, blades, clinical glass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incineration, <i>or</i></li> <li>▪ Treatment that is capable of inactivating spores, then landfill</li> </ul>
General waste	Green, black or clear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dressings, sponges, diapers, incontinent pads, PPE, disposable drapes, dialysis tubing and filters, empty IV bags and tubing, catheters, empty specimen containers, lab coats and aprons and pads that will not release liquid or semi-liquid blood if compressed</li> <li>▪ Isolation waste from Contact, Droplet and Airborne Precautions rooms</li> <li>▪ Waste from offices, kitchens, washrooms, public areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Landfill</li> </ul>

**Jurisdictional scan**

A scan of municipalities across North America did not find any instances of curbside collection of biomedical waste, nor is it accepted at municipal household special waste facilities. The City of Toronto does accept sharps and unused medication as part of their Household Special Waste program, as there is no provincial stewardship program for those products. HRM collects medication through the permanent weekly and annual mobile household special waste depots. Sharps are managed through a stewardship program with pharmacies in Nova Scotia.

Municipality	Program details
Markham, Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No bi-weekly limit of clear bags                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Up to 4 small grocery bags may be nested in a clear bag for privacy</li> <li>o Clear bags may be placed in a can</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Do not provide variances</li> </ul>

<b>Table 2 - Medical variances in municipalities with clear bag for garbage programs</b>	
Municipality	Program details
Municipality of Colchester, NS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 black bag and up to 5 clear garbage bags bi-weekly                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Clear bags may be placed in a can</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Do not provide variances</li> </ul>
Dufferin County, Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 clear bag limit per week (1/2 bag bi-weekly),                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Tags purchased for excess bags</li> <li>o Clear bags may be placed in a can</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Residents can apply for one free additional clear bag or use of a privacy bag with variance identifier</li> <li>- Limit variance also available for baby diapers</li> </ul>
WasteCheck, NS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 black bag bi-weekly and up to 4 clear bags of garbage                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Clear bags may be placed in a can</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Variances for number of privacy bags</li> <li>- Approved case-by-case at staff's discretion by conducting a home visit to ensure recycling and green cart programs are being used</li> <li>- 65 variances (18,800 households)</li> </ul>
Valley Waste Resource Management, NS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 black bag and up to 3 clear garbage bags bi-weekly</li> <li>- Variances to bag limit and privacy bag allowance</li> <li>- Conduct home visits to confirm request and that recycling and green cart programs are used</li> <li>- Approved case-by-case at staff's discretion</li> <li>- 80 variances (40,000 households)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o 34 additional privacy bags</li> <li>o 7 extra bag limit</li> <li>o 39 for both</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Residents are contacted every year to confirm they still need the variance.</li> <li>- Provision included in By-Law Directives</li> </ul>
Pictou County Solid Waste, NS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 black bag and up to 3 clear garbage bags bi-weekly</li> <li>- Variances to bag limit and privacy bag allowance</li> <li>- Applicants typically referred by VON or homecare</li> <li>- Approved case-by-case at staff's discretion after speaking with the applicant (no form)</li> <li>- 101 variances (26,355 households) covers extra limit and privacy bags</li> <li>- Provide stickers which must be affixed to the bag so the hauler can identify</li> <li>- No provision in solid waste by-law for variances.</li> </ul>

<b>Table 3 - Bag limit variances in municipalities without clear bag programs</b>	
Municipality	Program details
Region of Waterloo, Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4 bag limit bi-weekly; extra bags require tags</li> <li>- Not a clear bag program</li> <li>- Medical variance provides extra tags at no cost</li> <li>- Renewed every two years</li> </ul>

Table 3 - Bag limit variances in municipalities without clear bag programs	
Municipality	Program details
Airdrie, Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 bag limit weekly (1/2 bag bi-weekly); extra bags require purchased tags</li> <li>- Not a clear bag program</li> <li>- Variance provides one extra tag per week</li> <li>- Renewed every six months</li> <li>- Limit variance available for baby diapers</li> </ul>
Halton, Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 bag limit bi-weekly</li> <li>- With application, tags are provided for up to 3 additional bags</li> <li>- Tags are labelled `healthcare`</li> </ul>

The two municipalities who also offer bag limit variances for baby diapers have a bag limit of only one extra bag per week (1/2 bag bi-weekly). Dufferin County requires baby diapers be placed curbside in a clear garbage bag.

## **DISCUSSION**

Since the implementation of the clear bag garbage program, staff have received very few requests for additional privacy bag allowances. Residents who have contacted staff concerning privacy have been advised they are permitted to put their clear bag into a garbage can for privacy. In all but one case this satisfied the resident's want for additional privacy. Staff also offer home visits to assess the individual circumstances when additional bags above the bag limit are requested. To date only one visit has been undertaken. This resident realized they could manage within the existing bag limit after staff provided education.

If municipal curbside service does not meet the needs of a resident, they have the option of taking the material to the Otter Lake facility directly (\$5 for material weighing up to 100 kg) or hiring a private hauler to remove the material for them.

By-Law S-600 includes the following provision (14.1):

*"No person shall place waste from premises other than eligible premises or other waste that is not collectible waste on municipal property for collection or other reason without written permission from the Administrator."*

This provision permits the Manager of Solid Waste (who is the Administrator under the By-Law) to grant requests for variances related to materials being placed on municipal property for curbside collection on a case-by-case basis. Recently this authority has been used to allow extra bags to be collected after a roadside community clean up and the collection of furniture after it was removed from a local watercourse by residents. It does not permit the Manager of Solid Waste to establish ongoing programs or policies without the direction of Council; nor does it permit the Manager of Solid Waste the authority to grant variances to other sections of the By-Law.

Staff believe that consulting with the Accessibility and Advisory committee on the current curbside solid waste collection system and perhaps the establishment of guidelines for variances would assist with promoting inclusion and support service delivery. Amendments to the solid waste by-law may be required to implement any recommendations.

A request for additional privacy bags was denied by the Manager of Solid Waste as Council, through By-Law S-600 has reasonably addressed privacy accommodation requests by allowing one privacy bag and by permitting clear bags to be placed in garbage cans. Requested variances related to additional bags due to medical waste concerns have been addressed through education. Given the limited number of requests

for variances received since 2015, Solid Waste staff do not believe that a formal variance program, specific to individuals with large quantities of medical waste, is required at this time.

Allowing black bag variances raises questions within communities. If one house is seen with extra black bags being collected, neighbors may think they can also place additional black bags at the curb, leading to rejections. If/when complaints are raised there would be an onus for staff to attempt to explain these circumstances without compromising the privacy of the person receiving the variance. Use of garbage cans to meet additional privacy concerns ensures all residents receive the same level of service. It also allows collection staff the opportunity to apply the same rules at every stop, reducing the chance for mistakes to happen (i.e. accidentally rejecting an exempted bag).

**General waste** related to home health care is currently being managed in the regular garbage stream. While there may be a medical condition that necessitates their use, adult diapers are not considered to be biomedical and can be managed within regular household garbage. This is the same disposal option for dialysis tubing (emptied and flushed) and bandages/dressings. These materials can be placed in the one black bag or in clear bags within garbage cans.

**Biomedical waste** is not acceptable for curbside collection (per By-Law S-600) and is not accepted for disposal at the Otter Lake Facility. The only licensed facility for processing of biomedical waste in the municipality is Stericycle which is located in Burnside. Stericycle currently provides collection of biomedical waste, including sharps from hospitals, clinics and pharmacies around the municipality. Material is treated prior to being disposed to ensure no pathogens remain.

CCME guidelines identify that, 'Vehicles used by professional carriers to transport biomedical waste must not be used to transport mixed cargos of wastes and other goods... The biohazard symbol must be permanently affixed to the vehicle.' Additionally, regulated containers are required for these materials as per the Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG) guidelines. Once materials are consolidated a TDG carrier number is required for waste haulers to transport biomedical and household special wastes.

Curbside collection of bagged medical waste may also present safety concerns to the public and waste collection staff should bags be broken open by animals or snow clearing equipment. Biomedical materials could be spread over multiple properties. The risk of needle pokes can also increase with sharps potentially being present in bags versus regulated containers. Collector safety through the ability to inspect clear bag material was an important factor in implementing the clear bag program.

Curbside collection of biomedical waste would require separate collection vehicles and delivery of materials to Stericycle. Due to the special nature of materials it is difficult to predict what the private sector waste haulers would charge for the service. Tipping fees at Stericycle would also have to be negotiated.

The cost of collecting and processing biomedical waste is already covered through the provincial health authority, so municipal collection would be a duplication of services.

### **Basis for recommendation**

- The current practice to address privacy concerns is working. All but one of the requests received for additional privacy bags since 2015 have been successfully addressed under the provisions of the By-Law which allow the use of garbage cans.
- Residents have the choice to use garbage cans; this is the best option for maintaining both privacy and the goals of the clear bag program.
- General waste generated from home health care is already being managed through curbside collection. Biomedical waste is being managed within the healthcare system.
- By-Law S-600 contains provisions for the Administrator (Manager of Solid Waste) to approve variances to the curbside collection of materials. Each request is reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- There are no specific criteria or guidelines related to how this authority is to be exercised. There are other accessibility issues related to the collection of solid waste. Since those issues are

outside the scope of this report, consultation with the Accessibility Advisory Committee will help identify if further policies or guidelines are required to support service delivery.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

### **RISK CONSIDERATION**

The recommendations of this report are considered low risk.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

No community engagement was conducted for this report.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

Implications not identified.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Direct staff to draft amendments to Section 14.1 of the Solid Waste By-Law and return to Halifax Regional Council for consideration.

Direct staff to establish a program to accommodate additional privacy bags or bags above the bag limit for residents with a medical certificate and return to Council with the guidelines for the program for approval.

Direct staff to draft amendments to the Solid Waste By-Law to remove pathogenic or biomedical waste from "non-collectable waste" and develop a collection program for this material.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

N/A

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A copy of this report can be obtained online at [halifax.ca](http://halifax.ca) or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 902.490.4210.

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