

RECYCLING

Recycling center unlikely to take bottles, cans and jars for foreseeable future

Inmate labor unavailable for sorting By JEFF HORVATH STAFF WRITER Jun 16, 2020 Updated



Inmate workers may not return to the Lackawanna County Recycling Center until 2021, meaning the center's pandemic-prompted ban on bottles, cans and jars could continue into next year.

The center announced in late March, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, that it would stop accepting commingled materials amid the public health crisis. Recycling Center Manager Andy Wascura cited both safety and manpower concerns, noting Lackawanna County Prison inmates who usually sort recyclables at the center would not be used during the pandemic.

The Lackawanna County Solid Waste Management Authority owns the center, which is operated by Lackawanna Recycling Center Inc., a private firm owned by Dunmore businessman Louis DeNaples.

While the facility has and continues to take paper, newspaper and cardboard, Wascura said it won't return to pre-pandemic operations without an available inmate labor force.

As a result of efforts to reduce the prison population to mitigate the risk of a COVID-19 outbreak, most if not all of the nonviolent, low-level offenders who would qualify to work at the recycling center have been released, moved to house arrest or put on probation, county Chief of Staff Brian Jeffers said.

The average daily population at the prison in February was 677 inmates, 505 of which were county inmates, according to Warden Tim Betti's March report to the county prison board.

As of Wednesday, Jeffers said the prison population was just 494, of which about 325 were county inmates.

"The vast majority, if not all, of those inmates would not qualify to be able to go the recycling center or any other program," Jeffers said. "I don't see inmate labor returning to the recycling center in 2020 or for the foreseeable future."

Since the center stopped taking bottles, cans and jars in March, many municipalities that use the facility, including Scranton, have continued collecting those materials and dropping them off at the DeNaples-owned Keystone Sanitary Landfill. They've also continued curbside collection of paper and cardboard recyclables that the recycling center continues to accept.

Municipalities conducting curbside collections of office paper, newsprint and cardboard to market as recyclables are still in compliance with Act 101, the state's Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling and Waste Reduction Act, county Recycling Coordinator Barbara Giovagnoli said.

Under the act, municipalities with populations of 5,000 or more must collect for recycling at least three types of materials from a list that includes clear glass, colored glass, aluminum, steel and bimetallic cans, high grade office paper, newsprint, corrugated paper and plastics.

Of the 12 Lackawanna County municipalities that must comply with that section of the act, three — Carbondale, Clarks Summit and South Abington Twp. — contract with private haulers and aren't affected by the recycling center's moratorium on commingled materials, Giovagnoli said.

The others, including Archbald, Blakely, Dickson City, Dunmore, Moosic, Old Forge, Olyphant, Scranton and Taylor, will remain compliant as long as they continue to collect and market the paper and cardboard materials, she said.