

# 3 towns get recycle alert

## State: Resume glass pickup or do cost analysis

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Towns that dropped glass from their curbside recycling programs late last year will have to analyze the costs associated with the change or restart glass collection, according to a letter sent by the state Department of Environmental Conservation and statements from state officials.

The letter sent Dec. 20 said towns that stopped glass pickup violated state law, which requires a detailed analysis before materials are dropped from recycling programs.

That position was reiterated by the DEC's head of recycling March 21 at a Stony Brook University recycling symposium with the recycling industry, towns and state leaders. Long Island's recycling industry has been roiled by China's demands last year for higher quality recycling materials.

"Everybody's learning, everybody's growing, everybody's trying to get through this period. We want to help with that. We don't want to slosh anybody. But we do have to remind everybody there are certain requirements in the law," David Vitale, the DEC's director of the division of materials management, said at the conference. "We put the towns on notice that they're going to have to come in with an economic market analysis at some point here if you're going to continue not including materials like glass."

### No fines for towns

Vitale said the state was working cooperatively with the towns, and although the towns should have submitted the analysis before changing their programs, the state was not considering fines.

Brookhaven, Smithtown and Oyster Bay eliminated glass from their curbside collections late last year when they ended their single-stream recycling programs, which had allowed residents to combine paper, plastics, metals and glass for a weekly pickup. They switched



Glass bottles and jars are collected in the clear glass recycling bin outside Brookhaven's Rose Caracappa Senior Center in Mount Sinai.

to a system in which paper products are picked up one week, and plastics and metals another week. Brookhaven and Smithtown set up separate drop-off locations for glass, while Oyster Bay said it plans to do the same in mid-April.

"Requiring drop-off locations for glass while providing curbside collection for disposed waste and other recyclables does not meet statutory requirements," according to the letter from Syed Rahman, regional materials management engineer for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, sent to Long Island towns and villages that manage recycling programs. To be in compliance with state laws and guidelines, the letter said, "It is therefore requested that the Towns submit the economic market analysis to the Department for consideration, or that residents are allowed to place glass in the same bins with plastic and metals, as is the case with most dual stream collection programs."

Towns and their private recycling contractors said broken glass contaminates material such as cardboard, and other con-

tainers, and makes them harder to sell.

Despite public expectations that glass is recycled into new containers, the towns and private recyclers said there's been virtually no market to sell glass for decades, and instead the vast majority of material is taken to Brookhaven's landfill, where it's used as cover to keep down dust and odors.

In response to the DEC's letter, an attorney for Brookhaven and Smithtown argued the towns had the authority to make that decision because there's no market for the material.

"It is well-established that glass, because it breaks and shatters at every stage of collection and handling, is a contaminant when mixed with either fiber or other containers," attorney Michael Cahill, of Holbrook, wrote Jan. 29. "The problem faced by the Towns is that markets for all recyclable commodities are presently under stress, and glass is a contaminant when collected and commingled with other commodities."

"We can assure the Department that the drop-off program for glass is not a sham," accord-

ing to the letter.

Glass brought to drop-off locations is crushed to form a liner at the Brookhaven landfill, Cahill wrote in the letter.

Smithtown officials did not respond to a request for comment. Brookhaven referred to the letter from Cahill.

### Working on it

Oyster Bay spokesman Brian Nevin said the town has been conducting a market analysis since it switched to dual-stream collection. He said the Department of Public Works solicited bids to recycle glass collected at igloos throughout the town.

Vitale said the full costs of not collecting glass have to be taken into consideration — including transport to and from combustion plants and taking up limited space at Brookhaven's landfill, which is scheduled to close in a few years.

Still, Vitale said it's important for towns not to change what material can be recycled too quickly.

"You want stability in a program. You want stability for the process and marketing of material, and stability for residents,

so they have consistency and certainty for what materials to include," he said in an interview.

Vitale said the DEC would send a follow-up letter by mid-April to Brookhaven and Smithtown asking for an additional market analysis, which is detailed in state regulations. He added the state was trying to work with glass manufacturers to establish a market for crushed glass, so it can be turned back into containers.

Judith Enck, a former EPA regional administrator and now a visiting professor at Bennington College in Vermont, said since the 1980s, towns and private recycling companies have sometimes argued it would be cheaper to bury certain material than try to recycle it.

She applauded the state for asking for the market analysis, but said it shouldn't discount the possibility of fines.

The "DEC needs to be tough right out of the gate," she said. "We need an environmental cop on the beat when it comes to recycling, and many of the local governments appear unwilling to play that role."