WASTE MANAGEMENT PREPARED FOR THE EPIDEMIC CAUSED BY THE CORONAVIRUS

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the coronavirus epidemic a pandemic on 11 March 2020. A state of emergency was declared in Finland on 16 March 2020 and the Emergency Powers Act is now being applied.

Waste management is very well organised in Finland. The experts consider it unlikely that the coronavirus could be transmitted via waste when regular good waste management practices are complied with. According to current information, the situation does not call for any changes to the present waste sorting practices in households.


Waste management may be at risk if the staff of waste transport companies or waste treatment plants fall ill or are placed in quarantine in large numbers at the same time. This is considered unlikely.

To ensure the functioning of waste management, the Ministry of the Environment and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health have issued the following recommendations.

- **How should waste management prepare for the possible expansion of the epidemic?**
  - To prepare for the possible expansion of the epidemic caused by the coronavirus, it is important that the municipal and private waste management operators check immediately that their plans for abnormal situations are up-to-date, with particular focus on measures to ensure adequate staff numbers and the availability of resources for the critical waste management tasks. For the time being, the premises of waste management plants are closed to outside visitors. The restriction does not concern the customers of waste stations.
  - When the epidemic expands, instructions and regulations may be issued concerning the prioritisation of the waste management tasks and waste collection to ensure the functioning and safety of waste management. Abnormal conditions may require waste management to be organised in a way that deviates from the municipal waste management provisions and/or environmental protection regulations. For example, the time during which the loading of waste (emptying the waste containers of properties) is allowed may have to be extended. If necessary, a decision referred to in section 91, subsection 3 of the Waste Act may be issued by which an authority designated in the municipal waste management provisions may in individual cases grant an exception to complying with the waste management provisions. The local residents and the environmental protection authority must be informed of such deviations.
✓ Waste transport staff and staff of waste stations and treatments plants

- Waste transport and the whole waste management staff must pay particular attention to good hand hygiene. Hands must be washed always when coming to work, before meals and when leaving the workplace. If washing is not possible, hand sanitizer must be used. Disposable alcohol wipes should be kept in the waste collection vehicles to clean the steering wheel, touchscreens and other surfaces.

- The guides for handwashing of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the World Health Organization should be followed:
  - https://aineistopankki.thl.fi/l/28Kmmw89m2Hn
  - https://www.who.int/gpsc/5may/How_To_HandWash_Poster.pdf

- Gauntlet gloves that are as thick as possible must be used when working. As a rule, the gloves should be disposable. Any non-disposable gloves must be cleaned after dirty work at least with disinfectant. At the end of the workday the gloves must be washed thoroughly and left to try before the next use.

- During the epidemic waste containers where household biowaste or mixed waste or other similar waste is kept should not be washed. If washing cannot be avoided, it is particularly important to wear gauntlet gloves. Disposable respirators (e.g. FFP2 or FFP3) should be used whenever these are available. Disposable respirators must be washed after use and disposed of as mixed waste. If reusable respirators with P3 filters are used, these must be washed as instructed and left to dry thoroughly after every use.
  - Instructions of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health on how to put on a respirator (in Finnish)

- When emptying the trucks at waste incineration plants, the drivers should avoid working close to the feeder doors, especially when the crusher is in operation. If unloading takes a long time (more than 5 minutes) respirators should be used.

- After emptying the truck and cleaning of the unloading site the drivers must wash their hands or, if this is not possible, clean them with disinfectant before going back to the truck.