Waste Management and Covid-19 in The Netherlands

NVRD – Royal Dutch Solid Waste Association is ISWA's National Member in The Netherlands. There is currently a special section on the NVRD website actively informing its members and the wider industry about the measures taken in and for the waste sector in The Netherlands. Below is a translation of the measures.

You Can find all of the below information (in Dutch) on the NVRD website at https://www.nvrnd.nl/paginas/openbaar/dossier-actueel/rob/coronavirus-en-de-afvalbranche/coronavirus-in-de-afval-en-reinigingsbranche

Waste Collection
Waste collection has been identified as an essential service due to the potential impact on public health and environmental hygiene if it comes to a standstill. There are absolutely no signals that this decision will change.

In nearly all municipalities waste management services are continued as normal. Some authorities, are considering continuity or scaling-down plans, which include a prioritization of services, if the situation requires further measures. In that case the collection of residual and organic waste often has the highest priority.

Reasons for scaling down waste collection can be, for example, the loss of sales or sorting options (in some cases with textiles), limiting contact (e.g. collection of waste paper with groups of volunteers, or collection of bulky waste at home) or lack of capacity due to staff who are at home with health complaints.

Citizens can be asked to store clean and dry waste for as long as possible (e.g. wastepaper and textiles). The wastepaper sector has called on municipalities to continue to collect wastepaper and to offer assistance where possible and necessary. This is because the production of paper (and thus, for example, paper packaging and toilet paper) depends on the use of wastepaper and cardboard.

There are increasing problems in the processing and recycling of waste. Especially the markets for sorted textile and plastic packaging are starting to fail because of a lack of demand for the recycled products. Some of the textile collection and sorting companies are asking the public not to donate textile right now, others only want to collect at a (high) price.

In the Netherlands, continuation plans are a matter for the municipality and their waste and cleaning companies, and each can make their own decisions.

Waste Collection for People Quarantined or Diagnosed with The Corona Virus
The RIVM (National Institute for Public Health and the Environment) announced that, provided that normal protective measures are taken, there is no reason for concern and no further occupational health and safety measures are required. The virus is mainly transmitted through coughing and sneezing, direct physical contact and contact with many touched objects. Other forms of transfer are not or hardly known and, according to the RIVM, are not relevant to the practice of waste management.

Office Staff
The Dutch government has requested that everyone work from home when possible. NVRD follows this measure with regard to the office staff. Most office staff of waste management companies is working remotely. They do ensure that there is always a point of contact at the office,
so that the operational work can continue. Social contact at offices is limited by, for example, closing the canteen and allowing only one employee per office. Consultations take place by telephone or are cancelled.

**Drop-off Centres**
Many people use the time at home to do some spring cleaning. This makes it very busy on many recycling centres. It is difficult to follow the national guideline of 1.5 meters in busy recycling centres. The waste sector has therefore advised citizens to only go to the collection facilities if it is absolutely necessary. Many NVRD members restrict entrance to a maximum number of visitors, regulate the traffic flow and take extra measures to protect employees (for example, providing latex gloves, placing plexiglass and only accepting pin-payments).

**Thrift Shops**
About 40% of thrift shops remain open, even though they see a rapid decrease in customers. It is clearly noticeable that the Netherlands uses this period of working from home to clean up the house thoroughly. the BKN (Branch Association for Recycling Companies in the Netherlands) called for a people not to return items en masse because the warehouses would fill up differently.

**Public Space Maintenance**
Not only the collection of waste and raw materials continues, the management of public space is also continuing. Where possible, contact with residents is avoided. Vehicles have a maximum of two persons and are equipped with means for washing hands. The association for public space management put out a survey about the field service: https://www.stadswerk.nl/praktijkkennis/Nieuws/1606591.aspx