

Environment - Smile, your trash is getting its picture taken

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The photos Waste Management will be taking of your garbage cans won't be glamor shots, but you still don't want to get caught looking trashy.

Starting next week, Waste Management's upgraded smart garbage trucks will start making their rounds in unincorporated areas of Monterey County as well as King City. They will be photographing the contents of recycling and yard waste bins to document cases of overfilled bins and contaminated waste. In turn, consumers will then be notified, warned and later, fined, for violations.

But for now the aim is to educate, not penalize.

"The goal here is for people to do it right," said Paul Rosynsky, a Waste Management communication specialist. "We don't want to surcharge anyone. We really want to help educate people."

While cameras onboard garbage trucks is not new, the technology that will automatically photograph the contents of carts and sync that with an address, is. Waste Management has been using cameras for more than a decade to improve safety for drivers, said Rosynsky, and now they'll be used, along with automated proprietary technology, to improve efficiency.

The WM Smart Trucks aim to help Monterey County meet the aggressive goals of California's upcoming regulations which seek to reduce the amount of organic waste that goes to the landfill. Contamination of recyclables became a pressing issue when China and other international and domestic recycling processors began implementing stricter regulations on the amount of contamination they would accept before diverting those materials to the landfill.

This program will also address the problem of overfilled cans, which are a leading cause of litter and storm-water pollution in the county. If cans are overfilled to the point where the lid can't close, a gust of wind could blow trash out of the can and onto the street. Since garbage trucks are designed to lift cans with lids that stay closed

until the moment they're dumped into the truck, a can with an open lid could also spill trash out when being collected. Another major problem is that open cans attract rodents like raccoons and rats.

Customers won't notice a difference to service, said Rosynsky. The trucks will automatically take photos of the containers when they stop at the curb as well as when they are dumped into the trucks. The images will later be reviewed by a team of service consultants. According to Waste Management, garbagemen have been using handheld cameras to photograph instances of overfilling and contamination. Now, though, the trucks will do it automatically, which should improve service, safety, and sustainability.

"The only difference," Rosynsky said, "is we'll be able to get a better understanding of what's in people's containers and from there we'll be able to help clean up the recycling stream."

The photographs and data collected by these trucks will help Waste Management guide a 30-day public education campaign to teach customers how to properly recycle. If trash bins are overfilled or if the recyclables are found to be contaminated, Waste Management will send a letter and photo to the individual customer with tips and information on how to recycle properly.

Regarding privacy concerns, Rosynsky wants people to know: "Don't worry!" Pictures are not given out to any third parties and are only seen by the Waste Management jurisdiction and the individual customer, if a violation is found.

Starting Dec. 1, residents of unincorporated Monterey County will get one warning before getting a surcharge between \$9.62 to \$30.68 for each instance of violation, according to a Waste Management press release. The surcharge amount will be dependent on the type of violation, like contamination or overfill, and the size of the garbage bin. Violations can be disputed with Waste Management's customer service.

The money goes toward the extra cost of diverting recyclables to the landfill, said Rosynsky. The program is about public education and guiding people toward better waste habits Rosynsky said.

"The Smart Truck program is being rolled out throughout Northern California and Nevada where Waste Management provides service," said Rosynsky. "It's a phased rollout that will take place over the next year or so. Eventually, there will be a phased rollout in other areas of the country where WM provides service." Peninsula cities such

as Monterey, Pacific Grove and Carmel, as well as Salinas, will not be included as they are serviced by a different hauler.

“It is critical that we all keep our recycling and yard waste material streams clean to foster a sustainable future for the next generation,” said Kristin Skromme, Waste Management public sector services manager, in a press release. “We hope our educational campaign will result in not only continued clean streams and no surcharges, but also a litter-free county in the future.”

For more information on this program and recycling, visit <https://www.wm.com/us/en/recycle-right>