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Kent County Recycling Center to Begin Charging Haulers a Service Fee

Grand Rapids – For 25 years the Kent County Department of Public Works has accepted and processed more than 300,000 tons of recyclables at no cost to participating haulers. The DPW began processing residential recycling for most of Kent County after a local nonprofit organization discontinued operations in 1990. Beginning in January 2016 haulers delivering residential recyclables to the Kent County Recycling & Education Center will see a service fee of \$10 per ton.

Across the country, recycling centers are struggling with critically low commodity values. “A three-year trend of lower commodity values combined with increasing single-stream recycling contamination at the curb has pushed many self-supporting recycling operations for municipal and private companies alike into the red,” said Dar Baas, Director of the Kent County Department of Public Works, the owner and operator of the Recycling Center.

Residential recycling facilities are experiencing a perfect storm of lower demand and increasing scrutiny of recyclable material quality in China, falling oil prices and a strong dollar, sending commodity prices for recyclables plummeting. Tipping fees, where haulers are charged when a truck tips its load on the processing floor, are common in the recycling industry and \$10 per ton remains low. Most recycling trucks carry between one and five tons.

“Residential recycling is critical to Kent County’s integrated solid waste management system and the emerging circular economy. Kent County continues to provide essential processing capability in west Michigan. We encourage residents to participate in curbside recycling programs offered by our municipal and private waste hauler partners to provide manufacturing feedstock to the market place, economic value and jobs, while reducing dependency on landfills” said Baas.

The new service fee does not completely resolve revenue shortfalls and the DPW will provide a backstop for operational costs while Kent County works internally to drive facility efficiencies and develop a sustainable financial model for the Recycling Center. The DPW will invite stakeholders to help develop a revenue share program that supports operations, pays a dividend back to haulers when possible, and supports a consistent recycling message to reduce the influx of non recyclable materials delivered to the facility. In 2014, 4,495 tons or 14% of the nearly 32,000 tons that were accepted into the facility was trash. “That has to change and everyone will have to pitch in to help” said Baas.

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