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MEDIA CONTACT

Michelle Radley

radley@ecomaine.org; 207-523-3119

Third times a charm – ecomaine tags contamination

Staff from single-sort recycling facility will continue to conduct educational campaign in Maine Communities

PORTLAND, Maine – ecomaine, Maine’s leader in single-sort recycling, will continue to build on the success of its curbside recycling education program by expanding the project into more communities in Maine during the Summer and Fall.

To provide greater public awareness of acceptable recycling materials, ecomaine hired staff in the two previous summer and fall seasons to examine recycling collected in Maine communities. The program focuses on the education of residents on the topic of recycling contamination. This year, Sanford has been added to the list and interns will return to neighborhoods in South Portland and Saco as well. The ecomaine staff review residents’ bins and provide educational feedback on the importance of recycling – and recycling properly.

During cart reviews, inspectors lift the lid and evaluate the contents of the cart. They then issue green tags for acceptable recyclables within the cart or bin, yellow tags for loads that have a handful of items that are not recyclable, and red tags for loads with too many items that cannot be recycled – including trash. The bins with red tags are considered overly contaminated and increase costs for the municipality, and the taxpayers. Therefore, they will not be picked up by the collection company. The tags will identify item(s) that do not belong in the recycling cart for individualized education.

After twelve weeks in Portland, Scarborough, South Portland, Westbrook, and Yarmouth in the spring, summer, and fall of 2021, ecomaine will seek to continue the momentum in as many communities and neighborhoods as can be reached through a new model that shares the cost of the program with each participating municipality.

“The impact of the program has been growing, and you can see the difference in the recycling. As a staff member that formally worked tagging bins, I can say providing this education is beneficial for the municipality, the residents, and us alike.” said Michelle Radley, ecomaine’s Acting Communications Manager. “Moving forward we are looking to reach more residents and assess how we can increase the impact, based on what the data tell us and what we hear from the communities.”

When ecomaine staff ran the program previously, significant gains were made in reducing contamination from impacted loads of recyclables – in one case, reducing the contamination rate from higher than 80% down to 25%.

The most recent program began in April in neighborhoods in Portland, Scarborough, South Portland, Westbrook, and Yarmouth, with data collected and analyzed weekly. On average, through the project this spring, green tags have increased 52%, while yellow and red tags have decreased 62% and 69%, respectively.

More information on the program is available at ecomaine.org/tagging.