

More bins on way to collect plastics

But the city has to pay a firm \$20 a ton to haul the recyclables away.

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CHEYENNE -- Area residents will soon have two more places to drop off their plastic for recycling.

By the end of March, two more bins will collect the soda bottles and milk jugs -- No. 1 and No. 2 plastics -- one at Lowe's and the second at the state office complex in front of the Capitol Theater on Pershing Boulevard.

Since 2007, Kmart has been the only site in the city's blue bin program where residents could drop off plastic bottles and jugs.

Though the city empties it six days a week, it's always full.

"We're hoping this will take some of the pressure off," said Dennis Pino, the city's sanitation director.

You also can drop off your plastics during business hours at the city's transfer station on College Drive.

He asks that recyclers follow this cardinal rule: keep plastic shopping bags out of all the bins.

Yes, these are technically a No. 2 plastic. And yes, they are awfully handy for bundling up your cans and jugs.

But putting these in the bin will contaminate the load, costing the city money, when the object is to make money.

One reason is that you need to have a lot of these feather-light bags to make it worthwhile. No. 2 plastics are HDPE plastics -- these are what milk and detergent comes in, said Brent Hildebrand, vice president of recycling for Denver's Altogether Recycling, the firm that takes the city's plastics.

But the biggest reason is that these shopping bags get tangled up in machinery, stopping production and breaking parts, he said.

Instead, use one of the drop-off locations found in stores, such as Walmart, Pino said.

The original plan was to accept all plastics, Nos. 1 through 7, Pino said. Once the recycling market recovers, that will be back on the drawing board.

Because the recycling markets are "in shambles" right now, the only hope the city has of breaking even is to accept only Nos. 1 and 2 plastics because these have the most value, Pino said.

Though plastics are made of valuable petroleum -- and troublesome because they don't deteriorate -- they are not moneymakers in the recycling world.

They tend to be hollow and light, taking up far more volume than weight, Pino said.

With the markets down, the city also is feeling the pinch.

Instead of making money from its recyclables, the city now pays Altogether Recycling \$20 a ton to take them off their hands.

In addition to the plastics, Altogether Recycling takes what the city collects from its pilot curbside recycling program in the Sun Valley neighborhood. Cheyenne's Magic City Enterprises takes the other materials from the city's blue bins.

The recycling market is unpredictable as it is, Hildebrand said.

Four months ago, a load of PET-made bottles (the No. 1 plastics that contain your soda and water) netted \$450 a ton, but they recently crashed to \$40 a ton.

Right now, most plastics are exported to China, Hildebrand said, whereas four months ago, many of the milk jugs were

going to Heartland BioComposites, a Torrington firm that recycles them into fencing.

The city does not have a contract with Altogether, a subdivision of Alpine Waste & Recycling. Instead, they have an open-ended deal to take plastics and the material from the pilot curbside program.

Soon, the city will be seeking bids from contractors for its curbside recycling program, the first phase of which will be implemented this fall. Pino said he had wanted to wait on the contract until that became closer to reality.

Two more locations are coming to drop off Nos. 1 and 2 plastics for recycling in Cheyenne: