

## **Alberta's zero-waste champions challenge citizens to reduce, reuse and recycle during COVID-19**

Leading environmental groups including the Recycling Council of Alberta, Waste Free Edmonton, Plastic-Free YYC and Environment Lethbridge are sharing a common message – it is possible to continue to follow public safety measures, and social distancing, while also acting to improve the environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Alberta has excellent examples of reduction efforts across the province including reuse, repair and recycling businesses, events, groups and communities,” remarked Christina Seidel, executive director of the Recycling Council of Alberta. “While some of these organizations have had to shut down temporarily or limit hours, there are still many actions people can take with the environment in mind and we’ve shared these below.”

Melissa Gorrie, co-founder of Waste Free Edmonton shares steps that can be taken during this time to protect our health and the environment.

“For example, continuing to use reusable items as long as they are properly sanitized, avoiding the temptation to over-purchase food and other goods due to the current scarcity mentality, supporting the second-hand economy where possible, and repairing and repurposing existing items,” shared Melissa.

Actions and information include:

- **Reusable bags:** Based on information from public health officials on the spread of the virus, reusable bags pose a limited risk and can continue to be safely used. A practice that provides protection to both store clerks (who don't need to handle customer bags) and customers (who don't get exposed to plastic bags handled by staff) is the requirement for customers to bag their own groceries. Leaders in this field include Co-op stores (Calgary and Cornerstone Co-ops) and Sobeys, who allow people to bring their reusable bags and bag their own groceries.
- **Reduce food waste:** Tools to reduce food waste include meal planning (to use only what is needed to limit waste) and freezing excess items. For food scraps and peels, use your green bin or your own backyard compost. "These are challenging times, but community members can continue to reduce waste in their own homes. For example, being conscious of good food storage and preparation techniques can help to reduce food waste and save money (and trips to the grocery store)," shared Kathleen Sheppard, executive director of Environment Lethbridge with more tips on their site, <http://wasteless.ca/food> and at tips and recipes on, <https://lovefoodhatewaste.ca/>.
- **Essential services:** Recycling, waste management and packaging recycling have been named essential services in Alberta. Materials will continue to be recycled, but it's important that residents follow the guidelines in their communities. For a list of recycling and enviro businesses in Alberta visit: <https://recycle.ab.ca/enviro-businesses/>.
- **Reuse stores:** Second-hand donation services and drop-off services have been closed (these include the Salvation Army, Goodwill and Diabetes Canada). Please respect this and hold onto items until these locations reopen. Items left outside will be ruined - send your items to charity, not to landfill!

- **Beverage container recycling:** Some Bottle Depots have chosen to close or limit operating hours. Check your local depot or hold onto your beverage containers until the depots reopen.
- **Education:** Join online educational events to support local organizations. A list of these online events is available on organizations' social media channels.
- **Clean-up:** Continue to clean up trash in your neighbourhoods (safely with gloves) – Plastic-Free YYC is hosting a virtual community clean up on Earth Day, April 22. Details here: <https://plasticfreeyyc.com/how-we-do-it/events/>

"The COVID-19 pandemic is definitely posing many challenges for the zero-waste movement including small, local businesses who are being hit hard. It is important that we support these businesses that make conscious efforts to reduce waste or offer zero waste alternatives," stated Briana Loughlin, co-founder of Plastic-Free YYC. "Our buying power has never been stronger and will shape our post-pandemic future."

The economic benefits of recycling have been studied. A study conducted by the RCA in 2018 highlighted that Alberta's recycling sector generated \$700 million in economic value in 2018 and supported over 7,500 direct jobs.

"With these environmental, social and economic benefits in mind we continue to advocate for zero waste initiatives and a Circular Economy," added Seidel.

#### **About Environment Lethbridge**

Environment Lethbridge was founded in 2012 by a group of concerned citizens and business owners who wanted to see Lethbridge take action to become more environmentally sustainable. Environment Lethbridge inspires and equips people to create widespread community action and engagement towards sustainability.

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#### **About Plastic-Free YYC**

Plastic-Free YYC is a non-profit organisation focused on inspiring individuals, collaborating with businesses, and encouraging governing bodies to evoke change and eliminate waste. Our team of volunteers focuses on community engagement to share our messages and goals.

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#### **About the Recycling Council of Alberta**

The RCA's mission is to promote, facilitate and advocate for a Circular Economy in Alberta through waste reduction and resource conservation. Through a consultative approach and support of the RCA Committees and partners (i.e., government, industry, stewardship organizations and other associations) and additional stakeholders, the RCA will pursue protection of the environment through resource conservation following the 3Rs hierarchy.

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#### **About Waste Free Edmonton**

Waste Free Edmonton is a grassroots, non-profit organization working to significantly reduce the amount of waste created in Edmonton by stopping it at the source. That means producing and consuming less at the front-end, and reusing and repurposing items wherever possible.

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