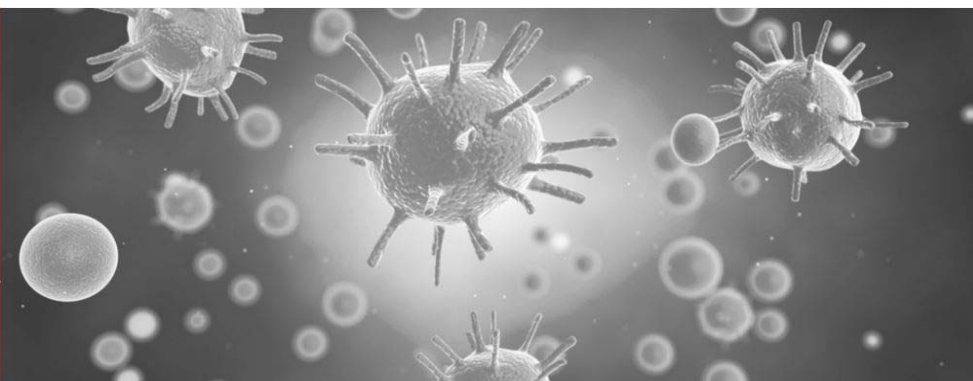


**CORONAVIRUS
ALERT**

24/7



Business support 24/7 during coronavirus pandemic

How to handle waste produced in quarantine areas?

One of the most important problems related to waste management during the pandemic is the handling of waste produced by people in quarantine and epidemiological isolation. The Act of 31 March 2020 amending the Act on Special Arrangements to Prevent, Counteract and Combat COVID-19 and Other Infectious Diseases and the Crisis Situations Caused by Them and Certain Other Acts (Journal of Laws of 2020, item 568; the “Act”) has introduced a number of legal mechanisms to improve waste management during the epidemic, but does not give detailed solutions for the collection and further management of potentially infected waste.

The problem is addressed in Climate Minister and Chief Health Inspector guidelines on the handling of waste produced during the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak and COVID-19 that it causes (“Guidelines”).¹ The Guideline recommendations are addressed to the following four groups:

- municipalities,
- healthy people in quarantine and people taking preventive measures,
- people in isolation,
- waste collection and management operators.

According to the Guidelines, the implementation of a special procedure for the disposal of waste from potentially infected sites is to rest with municipalities. Municipalities should be responsible for providing bags enabling potentially infected waste to be identified and arrange for them to be collected at least once a week. In order to implement the Guidelines, municipalities are advised to act in consultation with voivodships, the police and social welfare centres, which are the only entities that have the addresses of people in isolation and quarantine. Municipalities are also to be responsible for organising appropriate transport of the waste (to a waste disposal installation or special place of collection) and for disinfecting reusable containers and vehicles used to manage waste from the so-called C group (waste potentially infected with SARS-CoV-2).

Waste generated by quarantined people is treated on a par with waste generated by healthy people applying preventive measures (e.g. at the workplace, on public transport or during shopping). Personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves should be collected in separate bags and then thrown into the container for mixed waste. Other waste is subject to separate collection rules, provided that no restrictions on or exclusion of waste segregation have been introduced in a voivodship by way of an order issued by the voivod.

The Guidelines also set out a detailed procedure for the handling of waste generated at isolation facilities (households and collective quarantine facilities). The recommendations include marking the waste properly and how to secure it, e.g. by filling the bag to three quarters of its capacity or packing secured waste in an additional

¹ <https://www.gov.pl/attachment/54dcf1a5-37cd-4e82-820b-585ba87d44c6> (accessed on: 14.04.2020)

bag. It is also recommended that secured waste be kept for 72 hours before it is sent for further processing. Waste should be stored in appropriately marked and secured containers placed in areas intended for waste collection (multi-family buildings) or in designated areas on the premises (single-family buildings). Waste that cannot be mixed with other waste (i.e. waste electrical and electronic equipment, waste batteries and accumulators, waste fluorescent lamps) should be kept at home until the isolation ends.

The Guidelines also include the following recommendations for waste collection and management operators:

- separately collected waste should be stored for nine days before it is sent for treatment,
- group C waste should be processed only on fully automated lines operated without human intervention or, failing that, sent directly for disposal,
- special working conditions should be established and, as far as possible, workers should be provided with personal protective equipment.

In order to ensure the continuity of collection and treatment of mixed municipal waste and bio-waste, where there are personnel shortages it is recommended to ensure priority treatment of C-group waste and to reduce the frequency of collecting separately collected waste fractions (glass, paper, metals and plastics). However, according to the Act, changing the frequency of municipal waste collection during the epidemic is the responsibility of the voivod acting on the request of the municipality head or town or city mayor. It seems that the above recommendation can only be an argument justifying a request to the relevant authority to cause that a relevant instruction in this respect is issued.

According to the Guidelines, C-group waste is municipal waste whose disposal requires special precautions. Although the Guidelines indicate the directions for the management of potentially contaminated waste desired by the ministry, they do not contribute much to the discussion on the practical side of organising waste management during the crisis. It is also worth remembering that government guidelines have no legal force, so the argument for waste regulations to be made more detailed at the level of a statutory act is all the more justified.

We are at your disposal



Katarzyna Kuźma

Partner | Infrastructure and Energy Practice

E: Katarzyna.Kuzma@dzp.pl



Daniel Chojnacki

Counsel | Infrastructure and Energy Practice

E: Daniel.Chojnacki@dzp.pl