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GOVERNMENT

State official: County contributing to Point Roberts recycling troubles

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POINT ROBERTS - Point Recycling and Refuse has been violating county law by not providing pickup for curbside recyclables, and state regulators could revoke the company's right to operate here.

In fact, company owner Arthur Wilkowski previously said he expects his business will be shut down. But in a recent letter, the executive director of the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission said regulators could decide Whatcom County is partly to blame for the mess and allow Wilkowski to continue operating.

Whatcom County hasn't enforced a county law requiring residents in unincorporated areas to either pay for service or formally ask for an exemption.

"The county's decision not to enforce the collection district at the same time it insists that (Point Recycling and Refuse) provide residential recycling appears to be causing a 'perfect storm' of a shrinking customer base, increasing average operating costs, and decreasing revenue for PRR," David Danner wrote to County Council member Barbara Brenner.

Danner is not a member of the commission and won't decide the case, but he wrote to Brenner after she criticized his agency.

Danner wrote commissioners could find that "the company's failure to provide the service (is) due in large part to the county's own policies that may have denied the company sufficient revenue to provide the service the county demands."

Earlier this year, Point Recycling and Refuse's recycling truck broke down, and Wilkowski said his company doesn't have enough customers to pay for a new truck and continue service. ~~Wilkowski also has attacked Danner's agency, calling regulators "the epitome of paper-pushing indifferent dictatorial bureaucrats."~~

But, even if the county did enforce the mandatory service law, it's not a given that would boost subscribers, County Executive Pete Kremen said. Residents could instead seek exemptions, he said.

County Council member Sam Crawford recently submitted a proposal to exempt Point Roberts from curbside recycling pickup.

But some residents say curbside pickup is important, and Point Roberts residents shouldn't be treated differently than others.

"I just want to have curbside recycling back. I want the county to enforce its laws," said five-year resident Shannon Tomsen, who has suggested to Crawford she might sue the county.

Wilkowski knew what he was getting into when he started providing service in Point Roberts, and he needs to be held accountable to county law, she said. Not doing so sends the message to other businesses they'll be rewarded if they break the law, she said.

"All I want to do is have my garbage and recycling picked up and not have to hear anymore about it," she said.