



King County

Kathy Lambert

Councilmember, District 3

Metropolitan King County Council

STATE OF WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

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WASTE MANAGEMENT

Aug. 8, 2012

Jeffrey Goltz, Chair
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Chair Goltz,

As the King County Council's representative for northeast King County, I received a number of complaints from constituents about the recent labor dispute and strike by drivers with Waste Management. King County was able to refer complaints to the Utilities and Transportation Commission, which regulates Waste Management in unincorporated areas. I appreciate your response and scheduling a presentation and public hearing on Aug. 9 for customers to share their concerns.

It is important that the waste removal service that customers are billed for is provided on schedule. Local cities that have contracts with Waste Management are able to employ specific terms of those contracts to provide some relief to their citizens as well as to encourage resolution of any labor dispute. For instance, the City of Seattle is pursuing fines on Waste Management for missed service. As King County does not have the authority to contract with or regulate private waste haulers, we depend on the state Utilities and Transportation Commission to provide for the needs of citizens outside of cities through franchise agreements.

With much citizen input, as well as experience from flood and emergency events in mind, I urge the UTC to consider the following provisions for the protection of customers as well as public health and safety:

1. To encourage swift and good-faith resolution of labor disputes, the UTC should levy fines on private waste haulers that fail to provide services under their franchise agreements with the State of Washington.

2. Future franchise agreements should provide the same tools for compliance in unincorporated areas as cities have in their contracts with waste haulers.
3. If a labor dispute disrupts waste removal service for more than seven days, customers should automatically get a credit on their utility bill for missed collections.
4. The following week after the strike is resolved, customers should be able to put out an extra can of garbage at no extra cost.
5. Fines should be used to reimburse counties that agree to waive tipping fees at transfer stations and waste disposal facilities for customers experiencing disruption in waste removal services.
6. If a labor dispute disrupts waste removal service for more than seven days, franchise terms should require private haulers to have alternatives in place in order to resume waste removal service for both residential and commercial customers.
7. In the event that an emergency or natural disaster disrupts waste removal service, the UTC needs to work with haulers and counties to make sure the needs of customers are met, and that the county Executive, Councilmembers/Commissioners or representatives of the affected areas are informed and able to discuss concerns within 24 hours, and kept updated until the disruption is resolved.

Another serious concern, particularly in the rural areas under the jurisdiction of the UTC, is the health and safety hazards created by accumulated waste that is not removed in a timely manner. Through our waste reduction efforts, customers are urged to dispose of their kitchen waste and organics in yard waste bins. This is exactly the kind of waste that attracts wildlife scavengers such as black bears and raccoons in rural and suburban communities. Also, many rural residents live on acreage with a home that is a significant distance away from the road, which makes it a hardship for them to haul waste bins to the roadside over and over every day with the uncertainty of waste collection during a strike. This makes it even more urgent for waste haulers to keep their customers and local officials updated on the status of operations.

I look forward to the opportunity for constituents to share their personal experiences with the UTC at the Aug. 9 public meeting. Again, thank you for reviewing all of impacts surrounding this incident, and please contact me if you have any questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,



Kathy Lambert
King County Council
District 3