

Q&A

BIN THERE

Central Virginia Waste Management Authority breaks down the complexity of recycling and its future in the region

By Mark Newton

As the days get warmer and foliage returns, the end of winter also signifies it's time for spring cleaning, and the employees of the Central Virginia Waste Management Authority are ready to help your recyclables find a new purpose. With that in mind, Julie Buchanan, public relations coordinator for the public service authority, which started in 1990 and now serves 13 localities, shares what should and shouldn't go into your recycling bin and addresses Chesterfield County's expiring contact with CVWMA.



Julie Buchanan, public relations coordinator for the Central Virginia Waste Management Authority

Richmond magazine: What should residents recycle?

Julie Buchanan: What we would like for people to put in their containers, whether they're doing curbside or drop-off recycling, is aluminum and steel cans, glass bottles and jars, and plastics – what we call the kitchen, laundry and bath plastic containers. We even accept plastic yogurt containers and clamshells. We also want people to recycle paper and cardboard, and that includes newspapers and magazines. And then lastly, something that many people might not know that we do accept are food and beverage cartons, like juice or coffee creamer cartons.

RM: Are there any mistakes people generally make?

Buchanan: The biggest offender is plastic bags and plastic wrap. Keep that out of your recycling, and don't bag your recyclables and plastic. The plastic bags can get tangled up in the machines [at the processing facility].

RM: New bins were backordered for much of 2022, and a recent flyer was mailed out that said new containers will be delivered this spring.

Is that in response to that issue? Has it been resolved?

Buchanan: In our curbside program, there's been a wide variety of containers that you can use. Starting July 1, we will no longer be using the 24-gallon bin in our program. And the reason for that is because we wanted to give everybody access to the 95-gallon recycling cart on wheels. That will enable people to recycle more, it'll keep the material safer when it's out in the weather, and it's a little bit easier to move. We've been working on bringing carts to everybody as part of the new recycling contract that starts July 1 with the localities and our contractor TFC Recycling.

RM: Chesterfield County has decided not to renew its curbside recycling contract with CVWMA. What should those residents know?

Buchanan: We will still be serving them through the end of June. For some reason, a lot of people thought that it was ending at the end of 2022. We're still here to support them through the duration of the contract. We hope that those who are recycling now will continue to do so with a private contractor of their choosing or will be motivated to take their recyclables to a drop-off.

RM: What does Chesterfield's contract termination mean for other customers and the authority at large?

Buchanan: Starting July 1, the cost for recycling for our existing customers is still going to be extremely affordable for most. There's a range of about \$4.50 to \$5 per month for someone to come to your house twice a month to pick up recycling and keep that material out of the landfill. And Chesterfield County is still a member of CVWMA. They are part of the region that we serve, we would still work with them on things like electronics recycling and household waste disposal. We want people to have access to recycling, and we're continuing to work to grow that access for multifamily developments, people who live in apartments and condos, and also for people who live in rural areas who don't have access to curbside programs. We're still motivated to work on those issues. **RM**

This interview has been edited for length and clarity. More information about what can be recycled is available at cvwma.com/recycle-right. Learn more about the future of recycling in Chesterfield at chesterfield.gov/recycling.

COURTESY JULIE BUCHANAN



BUSINESS

Troy Webber uses his YardSmart app.

SMART MOVE

Chesterfield Auto Parts owner built award-winning inventory app

When Troy Webber's grandfather bought Chesterfield Auto Parts in 1947, inventory information was kept in a paper file. In the mid-2000s, when Webber's father was running the business, everything was on a computer. Now, Webber has

built an app, YardSmart, that stores everything he could need to know about his inventory. Last December, YardSmart won the rvatech/ Innovation in Cloud Computing Award.

"Chesterfield Auto Parts is a self-service junkyard," says Webber. "We have pictures of every vehicle so customers can see what the car looked like and

what condition it was in. Then they go out into the field and select the parts for themselves.

"We've got high volume and low margins. We purchase vehicles knowing we'll be able to recycle the metal to cover our expenses. Then we have fixed-menu pricing. An alternator, for example, costs the same whether it comes off a Honda or a Jaguar."

Chesterfield Auto Parts must report to authorities whenever a purchase is made, whenever a car is put in the field for sale and whenever a car is crushed. In addition to listing make, model, point of sale and all other conceivable information about each piece, YardSmart automates the reporting process. For the customer, QR codes on vehicles display all information about the cars, and the second the car leaves the field, the online information disappears.

Webber uses the app at all three Chesterfield Auto Parts locations, and last year it was purchased for use by another business with the same self-service model. A shift to Silicon Valley, however, doesn't appear to be in his future. "I'm not a software engineer," he says. "I'm an automobile recycler. And I can't imagine anything else I'd rather be doing."

Learn more at yardsmartapp.com.
— **D. Hunter Reardon**

FROM TOP: ASH DANIEL; GETTY IMAGES

ENVIRONMENT

Something in the Air

ANNUAL REPORT FINDS A SLIGHT INCREASE OF ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTANTS IN THE REGION

IT MAY BE A LITTLE HARDER TO breathe easy in the Richmond area, according to a nationwide study of air quality.

In its 24th annual "State of the Air" report, released in April and covering data from 2019 to 2021, the American Lung Association says ground-level ozone air pollution remained at the same level as in last year's survey of the Richmond region, which in the report includes 13 counties and four cities, earning it a "B" grade. The area's cleanest counties include Charles City, Hanover and Henrico, which each saw zero days that were high in ozone. However, Henrico County and

the city of Richmond experienced their first short-term spikes in particle pollution in 10 years, earning a "B" grade and dropping the region from the report's list of cleanest cities. The grades put the region in the middle of the report's metropolitan area rankings.

When asked about the report's findings, a state Department of Environmental Quality spokesperson noted that "Richmond didn't have any [fine particulate] exceedance days during that reporting period, and there was one ozone exceedance day in each year."

The DEQ's annual air quality report states that ground-level

ozone in Virginia "is usually only a problem during the late spring to summer months when the sunlight is most intense" while particle pollution can be breathed in year-round and potentially absorbed into the bloodstream, making it a "particular concern to people with heart or lung disease."

"Even one poor air quality day is one too many," says Aleks Casper, regional director for the Lung Association, adding that "Virginia must continue to enact policies to cut all harmful pollutants and ultimately protect the health and well-being of Virginians. This includes policies that would



help Virginia's transition to zero-emission vehicles through continued participation in Advanced Clean Car standards."

Earlier this year, Senate Democrats stymied a Republican effort to stop the State Air Pollution Control Board from implementing a low-emissions and zero-emissions vehicle program approved in 2021.

— **Mark Newton**

DEVELOPMENT

A SHOT IN THE ARM

A metro-area pharmaceutical consortium is set for a cash infusion

An ongoing effort to develop a domestic pharmaceutical supply chain in metro Richmond earned a special designation in October as an advanced pharmaceutical manufacturing tech hub, which comes with access to millions of federal dollars for its work.

The hub designation from the U.S. Economic Development Administration covers the Richmond Metropolitan Statistical Area, a large portion of Central Virginia. The consortium, led by the Commonwealth Center for Advanced Marketing in Prince George County, is one of 31 national tech hubs created under the federal CHIPS and Science Act. Each hub is now eligible to apply for \$40 million to \$70 million in federal funding.

According to Joy Polefrone, executive director of the Alliance for Building Better Medicine, a program formed by Richmond-based Activation Capital to unite the alliance's 15 member organizations in the public and private sectors, the alliance's goal is to address critical

medicine shortages and build a resilient national drug supply by developing active pharmaceutical ingredients — “that’s the part that works in your Tylenol,” she explains as an example — in the Richmond and Petersburg areas along Interstate 95.

The tech hub designation builds on several other recent fundraising successes, including a \$52.9 million grant secured last year under the EDA’s Build Back Better Regional Challenge that was “specifically advocated for” by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va. An advocate of the project since he was on Richmond’s City Council, Kaine says he “pushed to make this competitive tech hub designation possible.”

“I think it’s pretty incredible [that] there’s this group of people who are trying to build better medicine — and that means affordable and accessible and here [locally],” Polefrone says, “so that if we do have supply chain challenges, we have the capacity to have access to the things that we need in our backyard. And that for me is pretty cool.”

—Mark Newton



TRANSPORTATION



Bigger, Better Buses

GRTC is adding to its Pulse fleet

FUELED BY THE SUCCESS of its Pulse line, the GRTC Transit System is on track to add four 60-foot-long articulated buses that run on compressed natural gas to its rapid-transit fleet by 2025.

The buses will be able to accommodate 120 seated and standing passengers. They’ll also have a third door, which GRTC says will help speed boarding and make overall trip times faster.

GRTC’s 40-foot Pulse buses can be crowded at peak times, according to GRTC communication specialist Henry Bendon. Bigger, larger-capacity buses will help create a “generally more pleasant peak commute experience,” he said in an email.

“The Pulse has been overwhelmingly successful, outpacing initial estimates by thousands of riders per day and bringing new people into the system,” Bendon says. “Projects like the Western Extension (which takes the Pulse out to Parham Road in Henrico County) and North/South Pulse (which will run from Azalea Avenue in north Richmond toward Chesterfield Towne Center) have already shown the demand for rapid transit is high and the enthusiasm from riders is real — and these larger buses are being brought in to help deal with that enthusiasm.”

To accommodate the larger buses, construction at the Pulse’s 26 stations, which shouldn’t affect their operations, is set for this spring.

GRTC launched its rapid-transit Pulse line in 2018. The buses run from Rocketts Landing to the Willow Lawn shopping center. Through October of this year alone, there have been 1.45 million rides on the Pulse.

The articulated buses — which feature an accordion-like junction in the middle of the bus — will eventually replace the entire Pulse fleet. Current Pulse buses will then be cycled into regular transit service.

—Sarah Huffman

FROM TOP: COURTESY GRTC; ADOBE STOCK