



March 2024 Community Newsletter



“Know Before You Throw”

Tuesday, January 30th, a fire occurred in the cargo bed of one of our recycling trucks while on route in an east Millcreek neighborhood.

We are grateful that the driver was only shaken up and not injured, and for the quick response of the Unified Fire Authority to extinguish the flames. The damaged truck was towed to the salt pile area along Wasatch Boulevard to allow the UFA space and time to completely extinguish the fire.



Pam Roberts, General Manager & CEO stated, "I am so thankful that our driver was not injured, and I thank the Unified Fire Authority and Millcreek teams for acting so quickly dosing the flames and keeping everyone safe. This is an example of why waste and recycling collection is such a dangerous job. The truck got so hot that the CNG Tanks off-gassed as they are designed to do, so the tanks did not explode".

Inspectors have determined that the cause was not a mechanical or truck malfunction. The cause appears to be a non-recyclable item that was placed in a recycling can. While the item has not yet been identified, common causes for fires in trucks are batteries, which may spark as the truck compacts the materials. Any type of battery can cause this issue. Other items that have been known to cause fires in trucks are empty propane tanks, hot ashes from fireplaces or barbeques, or chemicals such as household hazardous waste (HHW).

As a reminder, everything that is marked “recyclable” is not always recyclable through the blue can pick-up. Batteries in particular, the probable culprit in this case, are difficult to dispose of. Although recyclable, they must not be placed in your curbside cans. There are locations that accept used batteries, such as Home Depot. Please take the extra time to dispose of them properly.

The action of a resident who thoughtlessly or unknowingly placed the wrong item into their recycling can has caused a very dangerous and expensive problem. The initial estimate from the manufacturer for repairs to the truck body is \$110,000 - \$125,000. A new truck body is roughly \$189,000. does not include the need to re-route recycling services with the truck out of service. For context, a new truck currently sells for approximately \$400,000.

We also cannot say enough about how grateful we are that this fire did not cause injury to the driver, any bystanders, or property damage besides the truck. We encourage everyone to think carefully about what you are putting in your garbage, recycling and green waste cans. Ms. Roberts tells us this type of fire called a “Hot Load” happens more often than we know. This recent issue is the worst she has seen in her career.

Please help this from happening in your neighborhood and find guides to what is and is not accepted in recycling cans on our website: <https://wasatchfrontwaste.org/how-recycle>.