

The Break Room: Olivia Smith, Solid Waste & Sanitation Manager, November 5, 2024

Narrator:

You've tuned in to another edition of The Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the city of St. Augustine works from those who do the work every day. Hosted by the city of St. Augustine's communications director, Melissa Wissel, The Break Room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events. And now your host, Melissa Wissel.

Melissa Wissel:

Welcome to The Break Room. Thanks for tuning in. I'm Melissa Wissel, communications director for the city of St. Augustine. We're talking trash and recycling this week with Olivia Smith. She's our solid waste and sanitation manager. And we have an upcoming America Recycles Day community event, Friday, November 15, here to tell us all about it. Olivia, welcome back.

Olivia Smith:

Thanks so much for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

It's been a while.

Olivia Smith:

It has.

Melissa Wissel:

But you've been dealing with trash. It's what you do.

So let's talk the recycling day, which is November 15th. But then I also want to hear about some of the great self performing stuff you guys did after the storms.

Olivia Smith:

Okay.

Melissa Wissel:

You were incredible. I know folks were a little frustrated, but you guys got it done. It's a process. So I want to make sure we remind folks what that is. But let's start with the recycling day.

Olivia Smith:

So yeah, America Recycles Day is actually on November 15th. And this year we get to host our event on Friday, November 15th. That's going to run 9am to 1pm at our solid waste facility, as we always do believe it's our eighth annual.

Melissa Wissel:

So that's the drive through.

Olivia Smith:

We have a lot of consistency. Yeah. So you drive through, it's a quick drop off. Again, 9am to 1pm at 601 S. Riberia St. It's to raise awareness about recycling programs, the benefits of recycling, buying recycled products. And so we do secure document destruction. That's always the most popular...

Melissa Wissel:

Fancy way of saying shredding.

Olivia Smith:

Yep. And if the truck comes out with a camera, so you can choose to drive and drop off or park and watch your documents be securely destroyed. Up to five boxes per resident. So that's important to make sure that everybody gets an opportunity to take advantage of the service. We also collect outdated and broken electronics and batteries as well as collection of used cooking oil.

Melissa Wissel:

And what do we not take? that's always a good one. What do we not take?

Olivia Smith:

The importance of what we do not accept our hazardous waste. So that encompasses tires, televisions, paint, other hazardous waste, chemicals, light bulbs, things of that nature need to facilitate through St. John's County's transfer station, not the city of St. Augustine. Tillman Ridge or Stratton Rd.

Melissa Wissel:

The one thing that always gets me to is what am I, how do I get rid of that big tire or all that I can...

Olivia Smith:

That's all.

Melissa Wissel:

Will they come and pick it up?

Olivia Smith:

They do not pick it up. So St. John's county typically doesn't. They will have amnesty days where they'll post it at some remote location.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay.

Olivia Smith:

To give you opportunity to go somewhere closer. But if you contact St. John's County Solid Waste 827-6980 they can give you all the ins and outs if there's a charge involved. Operation hours, things of that nature.

Melissa Wissel:

And just a reminder, repeating ourselves. Friday, November 15th. Shredding is happening. Oil, electronics, computers, batteries, no light bulbs, no TVs. And it's drive thru which is really nice.

Olivia Smith:

It is a drive through drop off. Yeah, it's really quick. I would say come early, you know but the Service is free. 9am to 1pm.

Melissa Wissel:

One year for one event. You guys gave out leaf bags. Are we we doing that or no?

Olivia Smith:

If we have the inventory. Some events are more popular for that and so we've got a restock inventory.

Melissa Wissel:

Want to make sure we set expectations.

Olivia Smith:

Yeah, we've had some grab bags and things in the years before but yeah those are also. You can pick those up at your retailers. Very inexpensive, very environmentally friendly.

Melissa Wissel:

So the one word we did not use in any of this was glass.

Olivia Smith:

I'm glad you asked.

Melissa Wissel:

That was a new program we got. We got a little funny and said I think our campaign was City St Aug kicks glass.

Olivia Smith:

Love it.

Melissa Wissel:

Tell us how we're kicking glass with this program.

Olivia Smith:

So the program has become very robust. So we started it in May of 2023. So we've just hit, we're hitting that one and a half year mark. We have hit over 100 tons.

Melissa Wissel:

Give me perspective.

Olivia Smith:

200,000 pounds to give you a big perspective.

Melissa Wissel:

17 elephants. I mean I don't know.

Olivia Smith:

We'd have to do a visual.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay. But we will figure it out.

Olivia Smith:

Yeah. And we have the, the drop off locations. Want to just brand those quickly. We've got our downtown location, 501 Riberia street for the Lincolnville inner city. We've got a location in North City, 323 San Marco. It's that little jug handle. We have got Anastasia island for The island folks, 143 Red Cox Road. Oh that's over by the lighthouse

Olivia Smith:

and the skate park just past the skate park on the right side. We have got the west side covered. That was our newest location at 30 Pelissier Lane. Archaeology building.

And then we also partnered with the city of St. Augustine beach and we host a location for them at 2200 A1A South. It is at their city hall location.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh, cool.

Olivia Smith:

So encompass with those five locations. We dump those weekly or bi weekly, excuse me, depending on volume. And then we actually move them through a 20 yard open top container. So the larger movement happens in a larger dumpster back at our facility. And then we move it with the company SMI Strategic Materials. They are the ones that actually process the glass. I'm very proud to say out of this 200,000 lbs / 100 tons that we have done here, we have quality controlled every load and we have not had anything rejected. So kudos to the community.

Melissa Wissel:

That's the whole single stream contamination that we always talk about.

Olivia Smith:

We look at the quality control and we had a lot of that issue at first. If you remember, we did a lot of branding. We had to like.

Melissa Wissel:

We had a bit of a. Whoa, whoa, whoa. No. Pizza boxes. You. You took pictures?

Olivia Smith:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

And we put it out there. People caught on.

Olivia Smith:

They did.

Melissa Wissel:

Really quick.

Olivia Smith:

They did. And to remind folks, we're looking for food and beverage glass jars, right? Mayonnaise, baby food, hot sauce jars, spices, syrups, perfume bottles, cosmetic jars, mason jars. That's the grade of glass. We're like, we're not. We don't want light bulbs and chandeliers and glass tables.

Olivia Smith:

All that beverage glass and just a quick rinse, right? We want to keep the contamination down and keep this programs moving forward. screw the tops off. It can't have any kind of contamination. No plastic, no metals, that type of stuff you want to put in your stream program. So at these drop off centers, the dumpsters that are blue, they say glass only and they give kind of a depiction of a decal of what can go in also with custom cut lids to kind of drive that message home. Then we also have the green dumpsters. Those are the single stream that we've had out there for years. That's where your cardboard, your paper, your plastics and your metals. So all of that's commingled in that one green dumpster single stream. The blue is strictly glass. It is a separate program.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay. If you're just now tuning in. You're listening to The Break Room and Olivia Smith is with us. She is our solid waste sanitation manager. We're talking about recycling glass, plastics. We have a recycling event coming on November 15th. That's a Friday down at the solid waste facility. That's just down the end of Riberia past the Willie Gallimore and Eddie Vickers park.

Olivia Smith:

Correct.

Melissa Wissel:

If you're wondering, I want to talk about the used oil and some of the other stuff that's coming and the holidays. Before we talk I want to talk about the storm because that was a huge lift. No pun intended or pun intended on your guys part. But I do want to real quick remind folks, give us a quick reminder about the holiday debris just so people can be keeping in mind used oil trees, no Christmas lights.

Olivia Smith:

Right So a little bit of all of it. The cooking oil you want to hold on to either for our event coming up in January we do this again non shredding event but we do offer electronics and cooking oil. The nice thing though about things like Christmas lights and cooking oil, you don't actually have to hold on to it. We do accept this stuff year round down at the solid waste facility which is also the wastewater treatment plant compound. So used cooking oil. No mortar oil, no hydraulic oil. We are talking cooking oil only. Containerize, let it cool, containerize it appropriately. And then the Christmas lights go in conjunction with our e-waste program, electronic and battery recycling. Bring those down Monday through Friday year round. You don't have to store them or utilize our events at the drop off centers to take.

Melissa Wissel:

when you get all those new electronics at Christmas we, we take them January, ..

Olivia Smith:

It's the week just after the new year.

Melissa Wissel:

So we'll, we'll talk about that another time.

Olivia Smith:

And Christmas trees too, right? As long as they're unadorned natural trees.

Melissa Wissel:

Right.

Olivia Smith:

You can get them out as soon as the holidays end on your yard waste day. For us in the city, citywide yard waste is on Wednesdays. As long as it's an unadorned natural tree. Go ahead and put it out there curbside. And it's amazing. But we find Christmas trees even in July coming curbside completely dead in the backyard.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, I'll probably have to wait a week because I think Christmas is on a Wednesday this year. So you'll need to, you'll need to wait till the following Wednesday. So keep it up that extra six days and then you can.

Olivia Smith:

No need to Call us. Just get it out there on Wednesday for yard waste day.

Melissa Wissel:

So before. We've still got a few minutes left, but I do want to give you a chance to share with our community. You and I were just talking about this. We call it self performing.

Olivia Smith:

Yes.

Melissa Wissel:

Which means we do it all ourselves. Which is another reason why we appreciate people's patience. Give us the rundown of how we did with Milton.

Olivia Smith:

So. What an undertaking. What an undertaking. We've all been through a lot of storms. If you live here, if you work here, you visit frequently. You've seen this, we've done this. The undertaking really took place when we got Helene.

Melissa Wissel:

Okay.

Olivia Smith:

Which hit as we were cleaning up from Sing out loud.

Melissa Wissel:

Right, right. Oh, yes.

Olivia Smith:

The same week we were cleaning up from a festival, we go into a hurricane. Thank goodness. Not a direct hit. We are so fortunate compared to so many. But it took us two weeks to clean up the debris that Helene produced. And as we were cleaning up on the final day in the final neighborhood from Helene, Milton hit the next day. It has been six weeks of hard, tireless efforts to get the debris picked up. One of the things that we want to encourage the community and really hit home in this conversation is we need folks to put these items out immediately. You know, as you're cleaning up your yards and your homes from the storm and you are able and you are in town, do not wait a week, two weeks, a few days, get the items out immediately. We do a triage, if you will, and look at the citywide debris. We need to assess that damage and then immediately deploy that extra manpower. So as we're trying to get all the utilities back online as a city, and we're trying to focus on your normal route structures and schedules, we also need that extra manpower. And without us knowing the volume of debris, we cannot perform at that level. So I encourage everyone, containerize your stuff. It's going to help expedite the process. Do not block roadways. Right. Cut things up, containerize bags or cans. Do not place your brush next to

the utility poles, electric boxes, fire hydrants, and guide wires. We do a lot of outreach together, Melissa, you know, on what interferes and prohibits that access. So as folks become impatient, there's typically a reason. Right. It's either citywide disaster debris that we're managing. Or that we're having an ingress egress issue with getting to your debris. Also not mixing things like your lumber, your docking material, and fencing with that vegetative material. We segregate it for a reason. And those transfer stations have permits in place for that material. So we're very strategic in how we move through the material and we move through those neighborhoods. But I'm very pleased to state that after six weeks, two hurricanes, back to back over 500 tons of yard debris, we are officially back on schedule. We have maintained our..

Melissa Wissel:

And you guys maintained the regular schedule. You were able to this time. The one thing I also want to remind folks, we didn't have it this time to the extent that we've seen it in the past. There may be some folks out there that this did happen to, but when we get that really severe water damage, what we end up seeing is furniture, construction debris in addition to the yard debris. So if you're listening now and you only had yard debris, fantastic. But keep in mind, just as a reminder, those separated piles of debris, any storm construction, yard debris, and we call it white goods. White goods.

Olivia Smith:

Appliances.

Melissa Wissel:

Appliances, furniture.

Melissa Wissel:

Do you find the community did better?

Olivia Smith:

Absolutely. And I think like you said, it wasn't a direct hit. We were very fortunate. But yes, it's, it's, it's instrumental. Right. In how effective and efficient we can collect the things from them being separated and then not under guide wires and things so that there's accessibility to get it. But the community. I wanted to thank everyone. We appreciate the community. You've had patience, you've had support for our staff, your assistance in getting things bagged up and out of the street, cutting it up to where we can get those logs. It's a partnership and we're all in this together. And that's our message to the community. Community is help us help you get it taken care of.

Melissa Wissel:

And then the, and then the downside of you being really good at what you guys do, we get really impatient.

Olivia Smith:

Yes. They expect it immediately.

Melissa Wissel:

And we appreciate, I think that, I mean, maybe that's the hidden positive of it, is when people get impatient. You guys are really good at it.

Olivia Smith:

Thank you. Staffs takes incredible pride. I mean, from the long hours during the day to getting all the routes back on schedule, plus the manpower it takes to just focus on storm recovery, you know, weekends. We're so dedicated and so passionate in what we do, and it's because the community has that same buy in. Right. And it's a reflection of us as a whole. So just thank you to everyone for being patient as we navigate this together.

Melissa Wissel:

And as we sign off Friday, February 15th, remind me the times again. 9am to 1pm. So get your recycling, your shredding boxes ready to go, electronics cooking oil, all that. And we'll see you on Friday the 15th.

Olivia Smith:

Friday the 15th, November 15th.

Melissa Wissel:

All right. Thanks again for coming, Olivia. Great job again and thank you for all that you do with solid waste.

Olivia Smith:

Thank you for the partnership.

Melissa Wissel:

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Narrator:

You've been listening to The Break Room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the city of St. Augustine. Join us each week as the city's communications director, Melissa Wissel, has in depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time next week for another edition of The Break Room.