

The Break Room with Solid Waste and Sanitation Manager, Olivia Smith, April 15, 2025

Transcript

Narrator:

You've tuned into another edition of The Break Room, a weekly conversation about how the city of Saint Augustine works from those who do the work every day, hosted by the City of Saint 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 this week we are going to be talking about Earth week and Environmental Awareness Week with Olivia Smith. She is the City of Saint Augustine Solid Waste Sanitation Manager. She is no stranger to The Break Room. She's here to remind us about upcoming community recycle events, other things trash and recycling related, Olivia, welcome back. Let's talk trash.

Olivia Smith:

Yes. Thanks for having me.

Melissa Wissel:

We thought we were so funny with that in the beginning. Yeah, like branded.

Olivia Smith:

I've just made a career of talking trash, so I'm glad you appreciate it.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah, we've grown up a little. We've. Yeah, it's alright. It's alright. And you get paid for. Yes. You get paid to talk trash. Actually, I love it. I love it. So, first and foremost, we've got a recycling event coming. We can talk about some of the other stuff. But I do want to make sure folks remember. Start collecting those recycling glass. Is it not glass? Sorry your jars of oil or is this not oil?

Olivia Smith:

This will be cooking oil. So not motor oil, hydraulic oil, strictly cooking oil, fish fries and Turkey fries and whatnot. So make sure it's in a sealed container, but as much as you can bring down, we've got a program for that. And so, yes, absolutely. Cooking oil, electronics, right, so outdated broken electronics, batteries, Christmas lights, all of that. We can take.

Melissa Wissel:

TV 's?

Olivia Smith:

No Televisions. So those are considered more of a hazardous waste. We've got some mercury leaded glass concerns and so we are at the mercy of our vendors for that quality control standard that is considered garbage at this point.

Melissa Wissel:

Is that it is a computer monitor?

Olivia Smith:

Most computer monitors are OK. Yeah. So again, we're kind of at the mercy of the vendor. So that's why we segregate what we can to keep it out of the landfill. So any questions call solid waste, we'd rather clarify for folks than to have them bring it down and be frustrated or confused.

Melissa Wissel:

Not light bulbs.

Olivia Smith:

No light bulbs, light bulbs, chemicals.

Melissa Wissel:

No paint.

Olivia Smith:

No paint, no pesticides, no tires. All of that is hazardous waste. If you go to Saint John's county's website, they do have a hazardous waste program. It's a very robust program and they do take those items where we do not.

Melissa Wissel:

OK, uh paper shredding.

Olivia Smith:

Paper shredding's popular.

Melissa Wissel:

People love the paper shredding.

Olivia Smith:

OK. Yes, yes. So that's one of our big ones that we do twice a year. And so we will have paper shredding for our residents, five boxes per resident. We do set a limit because we want this program, this service to be successful for many. So in order to offer it to all come early, if the truck fills up, it's kind of a you know, getting where you fit in. So five boxes per resident, 9 AM to 1 PM is our event down at 601 Liberia Street at the solid waste facility wastewater treatment plant.

Melissa Wissell:

There's signs.

Olivia Smith:

There's always good signage and we've done this now, Melissa, believe it or not, for nearly a decade.

Melissa Wissel:

Oh, my God. Really?

Olivia Smith:

Really. We have created, you know.

Melissa Wissel:

That must have started about the time I started. I feel like we've always been doing them.

Olivia Smith:

And if you remember, but it was an infancy stage of like, how do we channel getting folks to come right? We've tried all different platforms. And what works for that outreach? And you've seen it become very seasonal, that ripple effect is finally created. Folks know about it. They're looking forward to it. And instead of us always reaching out to them, they're reaching out to us going, what's the next date when can I come?

Melissa Wissel:

I don't want to have to wait. Can I bring it now?

Olivia Smith:

Absolutely. And that that's a great point. So the shredding is an individual thing. We only can do it twice a year. So we do it at the Earth Day event in April and then we do it for America recycles day in November. That's the only time that we can offer that, right? It's an exclusive program, but the electronics and the cooking oil, you can actually drop off year round. You don't have to stockpile it. And that's one of the reasons we do these events is to let folks know we're here to provide that program Monday through Friday during business hours, call solid waste. Let us know what you've got. We'll get you through the gate. We'll offload you in a matter of moments. Rather be the cooking oil or the electronics. We've got programs for both.

Melissa Wissel:

I did the cooking oil. I missed it. I think I was out of town or something. Or, you know, I was I knew it was happening and by two o'clock I went oh, That was today. But, you you're right. you just call down when you get to the gate you push the button. You guys come under onto the speaker box. You go in. And in terms of the oil you go off to the left. You go behind there there's a.

Olivia Smith:

Side to the wastewater point. The big grease pens, yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, grease bin or you can set it down on the on the little plat that's there and then of course your your team is all over on the right side for the trash solid waste side so very easy access to get your stuff recycled and to you without having to wait.

Olivia Smith:

And not stockpiling it. Yeah, absolutely.

Melissa Wissel:

OK, So what other, What other good stuff? You. You're busy all the time. I mean, you do. Your department does everything from street sweeping,

Olivia Smith:

correct.

Melissa Wissel:

Trash the glass recycling. You want shower glass recycling?

Olivia Smith:

Yeah, absolutely. So the glass recycling next month in May will be our two year anniversary that we brought this program from what was a curbside program. We had some hiccups with it and then we started the drop off program very similar to our single stream drop off which are the green dumpsters. Then we initiated glass and the blue dumpsters. So we have four city locations for drop off and one at Saint Augustine Beach that we've partnered. With all are quite successful and we dump them weekly. And then we Move it in volumes per month. Right now I can tell you going into our second year, we have 147 tons. So to put that in more simple terms 294,000 pounds of clean glass. We have had no contamination when we see plastic bags and other things.

Melissa Wissel:

Ohh. When we started it, it was like no, no. Yeah, I remember that. It was a nightmare, right?

Olivia Smith:

We had a real folks in. And like, don't do the recycling thing and throw everything. So we do quality control that per load in our yard to make sure that the material is clean for the vendors that are going to repurpose it and grind it back down into other things. But yeah, I mean, it's amazing to think so. 294,000 pounds of glass in two years that has all been kept from the landfill. It's very transparent. We know where it's going. We, you know, we know that it's from curbside into the processing facility, so. So I'm kudos to the community because it's incredible to see that volume.

Melissa Wissel:

I do it. I do it in West City.

Olivia Smith:

And it's easy, right?

Melissa Wissel:

Super easy. Literally drive. Drive up to it. Drop my stuff in it and keep on going.

Olivia Smith:

Noisy but easy.

Melissa Wissel:

So. So I do have a question though. So plastic bottles. There's been a a influx in my opinion of reminding people to keep the tops on that you can recycle the bottle tops for Plastic. What about your wine? Glass wine bottles or the with the foil?

Olivia Smith:

Confusing, right? So with the glass commodity, the lids need to be off because they might be a cork. If it's a wine bottle, they could be plastic or aluminum. Either way, it's a different material. It's a different commodity than that glass. I need that glass to be clean.

Melissa Wissel:

Should we take the foil off the neck too?

Olivia Smith:

You know, I don't think you really need to get that, because when they grind it. Most of that will dissipate, right? But when you're talking aluminum and quark and stuff, but with plastic, you want to be able to recycle as much of that plastic as you can. So leaving the cap on ensures probability that it will be recycled versus it being separated, and it's going to

slip through the cracks, you know, through the optical sorters and stuff at the Murph. So a lot of information.

Melissa Wissel:

All right. Well, it, yeah, if you're just now tuning in, you're listening to The Break Room. I'm Melissa Wissel, Communications Director for the City. And I have Olivia Smith with us. She is our solid waste and sanitation manager. We're talking about recycling, Earth week, environmental awareness week. I did have one other question before we move on to sort of our our spring cleaning topics. If for the recycling event that's coming up on Friday, February, sorry, April, 25th we talked about. Did I ask you this? I asked you about paper bags. Can I get paper bags?

Olivia Smith:

Yes, while supplies last. Also popular, while supplies last. So we call them lawn leaf bags, right. You can pick them up at your local retailers. Very inexpensive, but it's something that we like to do for the community. We're promoting that you keep that more natural organic flow with your yard waste. They're like a three mil very durable great for collecting, raking up your leaves, putting them in it, sticking it out for yard waste day. And but we still do collect yard waste and, you know, personal cans, plastic bags and things of that nature. But yes, we're going to give them out. They, they always. We give out all of them every event. So as supplies last. Yes. See us when you get there.

Melissa Wissel:

Yeah. Yeah, get there early. Get there early for your shredding and pick up your paper yard yard debris bags.

Olivia Smith:

There for the moment, please. Be part of the solution.

Melissa Wissel:

I love. I love the yard debris bags. I put mine out. So, OK, so other stuff that you're doing talking about spring cleaning yard waste, one of the things that we often remind folks about is when you're mowing, mulch it when you're blowing off your driveway, put it back into your yard.

Olivia Smith:

That's right, right, all of that excess nutrients. Clogging Storm drains, right? So we've got a lot of other environmental concerns that go into it. And then our street sweepers want to be very thorough. We we rotate zones, we have eight zones within the city and we try to do our best to keep that on the steady rotation, but we see a lot of times that folks are blowing out. So those leaves sit under cars, they pack up. So we've swept the entire neighborhood and then somebody moves a car, blows out and it looks like we weren't even there. And so we encourage everybody again, be part of the solution. Help us help you. Get your neighborhoods clean. Your storm drains cleaned out for when we do have their heavy rainy season.

Melissa Wissel:

Are you seeing an improvement in our collective behaviors? I know I'm putting on the spot. Are we still not quite getting with the program?

Olivia Smith:

You know, for the most part, I feel like our residents and even our businesses, they get, they get with the programs, these kind of outreach are important. Our collection events, when we talk about storms and we know that we're in this collectively. Together, I think that that does hit home to folks because most people want to be proactive, but they need the tools in their toolbox, if you will. And that's part of our jobs here, right, with the city is to provide that information, provide that resource. And make it a ripple effect so people feel good about what they're doing and they're involved in, they're informed. So yes, I do think so.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and if you live on a street that floods, you know, you kind of scratch your head. You go well, one of the easiest things to double check is your storm drain?

Olivia Smith:

What can I do? Yeah, to be part of the solution? Absolutely.

Melissa Wissel:

And then talking about yard waste composting. Let's talk about composting. That was another new program. We're in our third rotation.

Olivia Smith:

This will be our third cycle.

Melissa Wissel:

I know Liz was talking about it. You guys are still in the works. With what? What may or may not be coming? Do we have an update on that?

Olivia Smith:

So we do have a little update, a little teaser. We have decided to continue the composting program. Keep in mind that it is a residential backyard composting program. We do not pick it up at the curb and it is for city residents only at this time. We're not doing commercial properties, so it's kind of a sign up, right? First come first serve, but it has been so popular so well. Received and we want to divert that type of material so you can put yard waste and you can put your food scraps in there. So to move that material out of the landfill and do something more productive with it, enrich your gardens and your lawns, that is what that program is there for. So stay tuned for further details.

Melissa Wissel:

Just don't have any information yet.

Olivia Smith:

We're still working. We're still peddling through that information, right of deployments and numbers. And so that takes us a bit of time. But yes, stay tuned for further details. The good news we are. Bringing it back for its third season.

Melissa Wissel:

And composting, glass recycling what? What else? What? What other good stuff can you give us? We haven't. We haven't run out of time yet.

Olivia Smith:

So I just want to share some numbers, because again talking about being proactive, talking about our tight knit community, that does what they can to be part of the solution. Residential and commercial, single stream recycling, OK, so that's your fiber, your paper, your plastic and your metal that you're putting in the curb, both residential and commercial in 2024. We had 2,066 tons of recycling diverted from the landfill. 4,000,132 pounds of mixed recycling moved in the right direction. Four million.

Melissa Wissel:

Four million. Pounds. Let's think of what's a pound. Well, let's think a gallon of milk. Is eight what? How much is a gallon of milk is like eight pounds or a gallon of water or something that? Your brain that. Do the. Like, give me a relevant.

Olivia Smith:

A ton for, for instance, 1 ton is 2,000 pounds. So we've done over two thousand tons. That's a lot of clean recycling, and that's taking glass out of it, which is the heaviest commodity. So I just want to emphasize to the Community, when you wonder what you can do and be part of the solution, the little things do add up. And so I want to throw those numbers so people know that is our residential that is our drop off centers and that is our commercial businesses that choose to be part of recycling. This is not mandatory. This is optional for them.

Melissa Wissel:

I think we're a pretty green aware community.

Olivia Smith:

I'm so pleased, I have been here over a decade and so creating these programs and working with our businesses, our residents, our tourists, our inner City Department is such a joy to see us create and emphasize and support these type of programs. So I want to keep that going and I want to share those numbers.

Melissa Wissel:

You have a kudos out to everybody.

Olivia Smith:

Absolutely, also e-waste. So electronics and batteries, we average every year twelve to fifteen tons, so roughly 27 to 30,000 pounds of electronics that would have gone in the landfill a decade ago, right. You would have set your computer and your old VCR and cell phone, throw it in the trash. We move that out of the landfill and we're responsible with the material management side. So all these little programs that people may not see or they only hear about during Earth Day or something, please know that we are working behind the scenes.

Melissa Wissel:

All year.

Olivia Smith:

Actively 24/7 absolutely to bring you those programs, keep them robust, keep you informed, and keep looking for a way to to move them in the right.

Melissa Wissel:

And if I want to call you 825-1049. 825-1049

Olivia Smith:

Or solidwaste@CityStAug.com or recycling Yep. Recycle@CityStAug.com send an email.

Melissa Wissel:

Tune in to our other upcoming episodes and we bring you back. But now we. Are out of time.

Olivia Smith:

Well, thank you so much for giving me The platform to share that.

Melissa Wissel:

Great, great information. Kudos to our community and kudos to you and all the people that are down there, all that your staff and and all those hard working folks at solid waste. So we'll see you back next time.

Olivia Smith:

Thank you so much.

Melissa Wissel:

You can now find us on your favorite podcasting app. Look for us on Spotify, Apple Podcast, iHeartRadio, and more. You can find a complete listing of those Platforms as well as this interview and past interviews at CityStAugradio.com we want to keep you informed about what's happening in and around the city. Follow us on our social platforms. You'll find us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at CityStAug until next time. Thanks for tuning in.

Narrator:

You've been listening to The Break Room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the City of Saint Augustine. Join us each week as the city's communications director, Melissa Whistle 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.