Incoming tonnages are down big throughout most of the country, but at least some, but not all, end markets are satisfactory, according to a Zoom meeting with a group of CDRA member mixed C&D recyclers from across the United States.

The online event hosted by the CDRA on Friday, April 17 came two weeks after the association organized a similar event with many of the same recyclers. We went back to get an update on how different parts of the country were doing.

In the Northeast, incoming tonnages are down across the board because of a lack of construction activity, starting with the construction ban in Boston and the rest of the state dramatically reducing the allowed amount of construction. All the New York mixed C&D facilities are at about 10% to 15% of incoming volume. The rail operations that ship C&D waste out of state are at similar levels. End markets are solid, and because of a lack of auto fluff ADC made from C&D has a stronger market than usual. Recovered metal prices are very low, as they are throughout the country.

All of the same is happening in the Mid-Atlantic region, from southern New Jersey down to Virginia.

In the Midwest, the Chicago area C&D rolloffs are at one third of normal, and as a side note, most of the curbside recycling is shut down and material is usually going straight to a landfill. Things are crazier in Michigan as not only is construction reduced, landscapers were deemed non-essential workers, landscaping businesses are shut down, so mulch and compost sales have taken a hit.

Out west, from Washington State to Southern California, incoming tonnage levels to mixed C&D plants are at levels of 10% to 50% from pre-pandemic levels. But the mulch and compost markets are doing as well as normal during the spring start up, with quarantined people working on their yards and in their gardens. One recycler reported he was trying to do some improvements in his facility because the tonnages are so far down, it is easier to do than when it is busy.

Other ideas discussed on the call include improving communication with your employees at this time. Yes, this is always a good idea, but if you don’t have one already, start a newsletter, webinar, or a question and answer session with your employees to let them know what is really going on in the company. If they have a dearth of information, they will create their own narrative, and it probably won’t be positive. Bamboo HR LLC is one place to check for the software to pull this off.

Another suggestion was to show regulators, who may be inclined to limit recycling action because of social distancing requirements and an overabundance of caution, that processing
can still continue safely. Might have to send them a video of your precautions if they won’t come to the plant.
Collecting on accounts can still be challenging. Requiring payment at time of disposal can help, but some companies do not allow credit cards to be used because of the high fees. Reversing that policy now can help keep the revenue flowing in. Plus it is safer to not handle cash because of social distancing requirements.
A slightly different tack is that if you can, don’t be afraid to extend terms a bit with past good customers. Instead of 30 days, extend to 60 if the client needs it.
It was pointed out that while there has been talk of a switch being thrown and the economy will just start up, activity will be rolled out on a gradual basis. Think of it as a dial being slowly turned, rather than just a switch. And hang in there.
For more information, contact the CDRA at info@cdrecycling.org.