



DAVID L. RYAN/GLOBE STAFF

Gloves used for protection because of the coronavirus pandemic have been discarded in gutters, manhole drains, streets, and in shopping center parking lots.

Trashed face masks, gloves turning up on city's streets

By Steve Annear
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Doctors and nurses on the front lines of the battle against the spread of the novel coronavirus have had issues finding enough protective gear to keep them safe as they tend to patients seeking treatment for COVID-19.

But crews from Boston's Public Works Department have apparently had no problems locating such items — because they're being discarded on the city's streets, according to officials.

On Wednesday, the department tweeted a pair of images that showed

workers out sweeping up rubber gloves and face masks that had been left on the soggy ground. The pictures were accompanied by a plea to stop littering the items.

"PWD crews are working very hard during this difficult time, but we need @CityOfBoston residents to help," the department said. "We continue to find discarded rubber gloves and masks on our sidewalks and streets. Please be respectful of your neighbors and dispose of your trash properly. Don't litter!"

In a follow-up statement, department

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Protective gear trashed in streets

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spokesman Chris Coakley said “at the direction of public health officials, we are urging residents to assist in our efforts by utilizing trash receptacles to dispose of their rubber gloves, face masks, and any additional trash.”

“To prevent litter, these items should be placed in a trash bag with other items and securely tied,” he said.

The problem, it seems, stems from the crush of people trying to protect themselves from possibly contracting COVID-19 while stepping outside for some fresh air, or visiting supermarkets and other businesses deemed essential by state officials during the “stay-at-home” advisory.

City officials aren’t the only ones who have taken notice.

On Twitter, people have been deriding residents who have purchased or been given personal protective gear like rubber gloves and face masks, and then tossed them on the street with disregard when they’ve finished using them.

“Please stop throwing your nasty . . . rubber gloves and masks on the ground. That’s disgusting and very bad for the environment!!!!,” one person wrote Wednesday.

Someone in Malden reached out to officials there pointing out the same problem, tweeting, “I have noticed an increase in used surgical masks and gloves on the ground. Could you remind residents proper disposal of these items?”

In Central Massachusetts, the Telegram and Gazette reported this week that rubber gloves were easily found scattered about in various supermarket parking lots. Officials there cited the danger of such practices, noting that the virus can live on certain surfaces, like plastic, for a period of time.



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A discarded glove and mask were covered with debris on Howard Street in Cambridge on Thursday.

Complaints about the used items have also been lodged on Boston’s BOS:311 website and app recently.

A photo sent to the city from one person Thursday apparently showed a parking lot outside of a Shaw’s supermarket in Hyde Park pocked by purple, pink, and blue rubber gloves.

In another complaint, reported on March 26, a resident said there were “Lots of gloves and masks scattered about along American Legion [Highway],” in Roslindale.

Mikki DeSisto Falcone of East Boston said she called the BOS:311 phone line when she and her husband saw masks and gloves on the ground near their apartment last week. She said officials were coming out to address the mess.

Livia Rosado also saw the problem firsthand. During a recent trip to Target in Medford, in a small area near the store, there were at least seven gloves splayed on the ground, she said.

“I even told my fiancé how bad it was,” she said in a mes-

sage to the Globe.

For Casey Armata, the debris has been hard to escape. She has been spending time between her house in Quincy and her brother’s house in Dorchester during the shutdown. One day, while on her balcony, she watched a glove blow by.

“They’re everywhere. Grocery stores, taking a walk down the street, my apartment complex,” she said in a telephone interview. “Literally, you see . . . gloves everywhere.”

Armata said she assumes people are throwing them on the ground because they don’t want to bring them into the house or car after shopping, and trash receptacles may not be immediately nearby. Still, she added, it’s no excuse.

“It’s rather disgusting,” she said. “People should have some common decency and throw them away at least.”

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