

COVID-19 restrictions help fuel increased demand for cardboard boxes



There has been a jump in home deliveries since COVID-19 restrictions were put in place across the country, which is driving up demand for cardboard boxes. (Sashkin/Shutterstock)

The simple cardboard box, often ignored in favour of the contents it holds, is helping Canadians stay home to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

To help keep goods moving around the country, millions more boxes are being produced in Canada to meet increased demand from online retailers, pizza shops, restaurants and grocery stores, said Allen Kirkpatrick, the executive director of the Canadian Corrugated and Containerboard Association.

"We couldn't imagine a world without boxes, that might be hard for you to relate to, but in truth if you don't have that box to move something, it just creates havoc everywhere," said Kirkpatrick.

"Anything, whether it's from the big people like Amazon or whether you're picking something up curbside, that's coming in a box."

The association represents Canadian manufacturers of corrugated cardboard boxes.

Across the country, there are more than 50 manufacturing plants that either make the paper supplies needed to create cardboard boxes or produce the finished boxes themselves. Most boxes used in Canada are produced here and the materials for them largely come from domestic recycling programs, said Kirkpatrick.



Allen Kirkpatrick is the executive director of the Canadian Corrugated and Containerboard Association.
(Submitted by Allen Fitzpatrick)

Box producers were worried their industry would be shut down when COVID-19 restrictions took hold. But after contacting all levels of government, the industry was declared an essential service.

In March, the industry saw a seven per cent increase in demand, compared to that month a year ago.

"We supply the essential to the essential," said Kirkpatrick.

"It was everything to do with home supplies, either through retail or if you can believe this, pizza boxes. Just [through] the roof. Anything to do with the home delivery market, we had new customers calling in who wanted to get [into] home delivery.

"All that activity was just over the top."

Kirkpatrick said a conservative estimate is that the increased sales have pumped hundreds of thousands of additional dollars into the industry.



Cardboard boxes are produced at several manufacturing plants across the country. (Canadian Corrugated and Containerboard Association)

He said that surprised many manufacturers because so many sectors of the economy were shutting down.

However, not all cardboard box manufacturers are seeing increased demand since large-scale shutdowns in some industries — like automaking — have led to a drastic decline in the number of boxes they need.

Kirkpatrick said plants in Ontario and Quebec have seen the biggest increase in demand for boxes.

To meet demand, some manufacturers added extra shifts and people worked overtime. So far, things show no sign of slowing down.

Kirkpatrick said the factories that make cardboard boxes are large and automated, so work crews can practise physical distancing.



Millions of new boxes have been produced in Canada to meet increased demand. (vectorfusionart/Shutterstock)

Canada Post is also seeing a surge in demand.

Since the end of April, it has been delivering a record number of parcels, far higher than they would normally see at this time of year, said a Canada Post spokesperson in an email.

On April 20, the postal service said it delivered 1.8 million parcels to Canadians, many of which came in cardboard boxes. That kind of volume is usually only seen during the biggest delivery days during the Christmas season.

All those packages moving through the system have also caused delivery delays, according to a Canada Post news release.

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