

# PPSReview

**MANAGING WASTE RESPONSIBLY**

**Product & Packaging  
Stewardship Review**

**An information service for municipal governments**

**Vol 8, Issue 4, August 2008**

WEEKS AFTER ONTARIO PROGRAM LAUNCHED

## Minister calls on stewards to pay all MHSW costs

Environment Minister John Gerretsen is calling on industry stewards to cover 100% of the costs of managing municipal hazardous or special wastes (MHSW) in Ontario.

The first phase of the Ontario MHSW program was rolled out to the public on July 1 of this year.

In a formal program request letter to Gemma Zecchini, the Chair of Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO), the Minister provides direction on the next phases of the MHSW program.

The Minister calls on WDO to provide an amended program proposal for Phase 1 materials and a new proposal for Phase 2 materials by March 2, 2009. WDO then has until August 31, 2009, to submit a further proposal that includes Phase 3 materials.

“Funding for the amended program shall become the full responsibility of the stewards,” writes Minister Gerretsen in his July 22 letter. “And shall address all costs inclusive of collection through to final diversion or disposal of MHSW.”

### NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR PHASE 2 MHSW

In his letter, the Minister sets a series of requirements for industry to meet in amending the current program plan and developing the MHSW Phase 2 program plan.

An addendum to Minister Gerretsen’s letter outlines exactly what costs stewards will be responsible to cover. At a minimum, they will include costs for collecting, storing, handling and packaging for shipment all MHSW collected for diversion or disposal; incentives to encourage material recovery; research and development to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of MHSW collection and diversion; and promotion and education to support MSHW diversion.

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### CONDUCTING AN ‘ANTI-GLASS’ CAMPAIGN

## O-I closes Toronto plant, LCBO actions “a factor”

Owens Illinois will close its glass container plant in Toronto, on September 30, 2008. Approximately 430 employees will be affected. Existing production from the Toronto plant will be transferred to other O-I facilities, including those in nearby Brampton and in Montreal.

The announcement comes just four weeks after the company wrote to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty complaining that the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) was undermining business by urging its clients to switch to alternative packaging.

In a letter to the Premier July 2, and copied to other ministers as well as MPPs where the company has plants, O-I CEO Albert Stroucken says LCBO’s media communications “are having a material effect on the viability” of the company’s Canadian manufacturing operations.

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# Briefly...

## CELL PHONE RECYCLING AT 3%

A recent global survey by mobile communications giant Nokia shows that only 3% of cell phone owners say they had recycled their old phone. A further 16% said they pass their old phones on to someone else, while only 4% admitted to throwing them in the garbage. The survey suggested that 44% of old cell phones are simply being kept at home never used. The survey revealed that a main reason why so few people recycle their mobile phones is because they simply don't know that it is possible to do so. Up to 80% of a Nokia phone can be recycled, and the company offers over 5,000 collection points worldwide.

*Nokia, July 8, 2008*  
[www.nokia.com](http://www.nokia.com)

## GINGER AND GARLIC FOR PLASTIC IN INDIA

Environ, a non-governmental organization in Guwahati, India, is offering homemakers ginger and garlic in exchange for scrap polyethylene. For every kilogram of used polyethylene, Environ provides the spices in amounts worth up to 10 rupees. The plastic is then sorted and sold to recyclers, with income used to buy spices. The program is proving successful, with 75 kilograms of plastic exchanged from one building on its first day. The program is to prevent plastics waste from getting into drains and wetlands.

*Voice of India, June 13, 2008*  
[www.voiceofindia.in](http://www.voiceofindia.in)

## JAPAN TO CONSIDER P.E.T. REUSE

In March of this year, the Japanese Ministry of the Environment established a committee to introduce a system for washing and reusing PET bottles (currently recycled or disposed of in Japan). The committee will consider all aspects of reuse, including consumer acceptability, economics, systems to collect returnable bottles, and food safety and quality issues.

*Japan for Sustainability, June 29, 2008*  
[www.japanfs.org](http://www.japanfs.org)

## NEW DESIGN GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, CHALLENGE FOR USERS

Sam's Clubs in the US formally announced a shift to a new milk jug design. Used by the retailer Costco for several

years, the square-shaped jug is reported to cost less and be better for the environment. However many customers are unsure of the new design, which they find makes it difficult to pour milk without spilling. The new shape eliminates the need for milk crates, as the jugs can be stacked four-high on a pallet, which is then shrink-wrapped and moved with a forklift. A dairy using the new jugs estimates that the switch has cut labour by half and reduced water use (for cleaning the returned milk crates) by 60-70%. The more efficient packing allows more gallons of milk fit on a truck and in store coolers, and reduces the need to pick-up empty crates, reducing the number of truck trips from the dairy to the store.



Photo: Sam's Club ([pressroom.samsclub.com](http://pressroom.samsclub.com))

*New York Times, June 30, 2008*  
[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

## BREWER TO INTRODUCE CARBON FOOTPRINT LABELS

Next year, Japanese brewer Sapporo will introduce a new label on its Black Label Draft Beer, stating how much carbon dioxide is emitted per can from production to disposal. Sapporo claims it will be the world's first brewer to provide the carbon footprint of its products on the label. The labels will appear after the Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Ministry finalizes unified rules on how to calculate and label carbon dioxide emissions (expected in February or March). *(For a less progressive use of labels see Page 4/8- editor.)*

*Resource Recovery Forum, June 30, 2008*  
[www.resourcesnotwaste.org](http://www.resourcesnotwaste.org)

## BAGS FROM SCRAP AUTOMOTIVE PARTS

Creator Co. from Japan has introduced a shoulder bag made from automotive airbags and leather seats. This is the fourth in a line of reuse-based totes from the company, using materials that would have otherwise been thrown away. Each of the new shoulder bags features an eco-rating label that indicates the ratio of scrap materials used to make the bag.

*Japan for Sustainability, July 16, 2008*  
[www.japanfs.org](http://www.japanfs.org)

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Anyone wishing to support the Fair Comment Project may email Ben Bennett ([bbc@albedo.net](mailto:bbc@albedo.net)). Confidentiality is guaranteed.

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APPROVED JULY 10, STARTS APRIL 2009

# WEEE plan a go in Ontario

Ontario Environment Minister John Gerretsen signed the Waste Electronic and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Program Plan July 10, bringing into effect industry's proposal to manage E-waste in the province.

The plan had been with the Minister Gerretsen for consideration since March, after being approved by the Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO) board and posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights registry.

Starting April 1 of next year, consumers in Ontario will pay a per-item fee for all televisions and computers sold in the province. The fees will be used to offset the anticipated \$62 million cost (in year one) to industry to collect, transport and safely process the end-of-life electronics. It is expected that 17,000 new tonnes of electronics will be diverted through the program in year one. Currently the province estimates about 27% of electronic waste is reused or recycled.

## COSTS WILL VARY

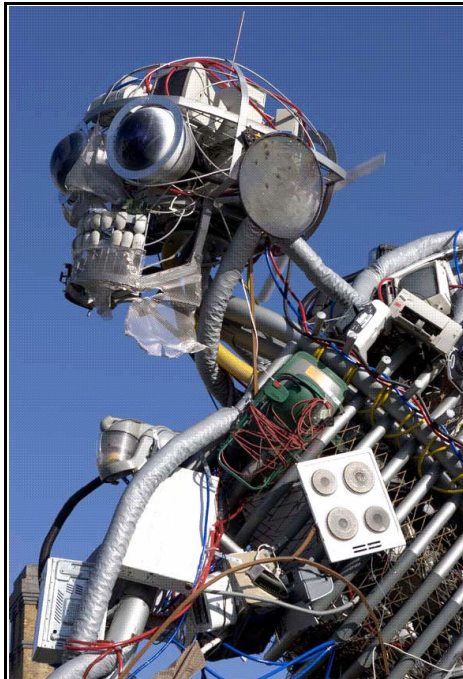
The costs to consumers will vary per item, with \$10.07 being added to the cost of a television, \$13.44 added to a desk-top computer, and \$0.32 added to a computer mouse or keyboard.

The program will be administered by Ontario Electronic Stewardship (OES), a not-for-profit organization formed by larger retailers and manufacturers to implement the WEEE plan.

As part of the plan, OES will track and audit the WEEE recycling system, including verifying that materials are managed in an environmentally sound manner.

## NEW PLAN DOESN'T PLEASE ALL

In a pre-emptive move, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) held a joint press conference with the newly formed Ontario Electronic Resource Recovery Alliance (OERRA) on July 3 to call on Minister Gerretsen to reject the proposed WEEE plan. In a press



WEEE Man, is a seven-metre high, human figure composed of three tonnes of WEEE. This represents the total amount of electronic waste that an average person in the UK is likely to consume in their lifetime. WEEE Man was launched in 2005 as a project of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) — [www.weeman.org](http://www.weeman.org).

release for the conference, Ken Gaudet, the Ontario Director of the CTF claimed that, "simply, plainly and factually this is a new consumer tax."

Responding to this allegation in the media on the day he approved the plan, Minister Gerretsen disagreed with Mr. Gaudet's claim, saying, "Government doesn't see a penny of this; it's not a tax, It's not a government fee. It is an industry fee..."

At the same July 3 press conference, representatives from OERRA, made up of groups opposed to the WEEE plan, also urged the Minister not to sign.

## BUYING MONOPOLY

Dennis Maslo, a partner at Computation Ltd., said the plan would cause a buying monopoly that would allow the interests of large, multi-national electronic equipment manufacturers to control WEEE processing

in the province and perhaps squeeze out some of the smaller recyclers. This point had been raised by the smaller WEEE recyclers several times during the review process for the new plan.

On May 5, Richard Taylor, the deputy commissioner of the Competition Bureau of Canada weighed in, posting a comment under the Environmental Bill of Rights review that "encouraged [the Minister] to take whatever steps [he] felt were necessary to ensure that competition issues are considered when evaluating the fairness of the plan."

Both the CTF and the Recovery Alliance stated at the press conference that plan will not encourage better design on the part of manufacturers.

Glenda Gies, Executive Director of Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO) countered that argument, stating in the *Toronto Star* on July 10 that the WDO has the authority to create variable fees to reduce the steward fees levied to manufacturers that make their products easier to recycle.

## PHASE II TO INCLUDE MORE WEEE

The WDO is now considering other WEEE products that will be covered in Phase II of the program.

Telephones, cell phones, modems, cameras, photocopiers, DVD and video players, and stereo equipment are among the items that may be put forth in the summer of 2009 to be added to the program.

For more information visit the OES website ([www.ontarioelectronicstewardship.ca](http://www.ontarioelectronicstewardship.ca)).

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# DESPITE CONCERNS OF RECYCLERS Green Key now on store shelves

Coleman Canada's Green Key tool are now available in stores. The keys, which look like a green plastic thumb-tack, are inserted into the top of 466-mL propane cylinders to vent the contents to the atmosphere and keep the valve permanently open.

In a July 8 press release, Coleman says that a "short period of time" after the key is inserted into the valve of the cylinder, there is no propane left in the tank, the tank is no longer pressurized and so the cylinder can be treated as scrap metal rather than hazardous waste.



Photo: Coleman Canada

In Canada, all sealed propane cylinders are required to be treated as hazardous waste. As reported in the June 2008 edition of *PPSReview*, Ontario municipal recycling representatives have grave concerns over the use of the

Green Key. The Association of Municipal Recycling Coordinators has called on the province to remove the tools from store shelves until environmental and health and safety concerns can be fully explored. Its concerns include the safety of venting

gas into homes and the atmosphere and improperly vented cylinders being sent to municipal recycling facilities, where they could lead to explosions as they move through the balers.

In its press release, Coleman offers to provide "technical and other assistance to municipalities in Canada to assist them in developing curbside collection programs that will accept the vented cylinders."

Coleman says is already working with the Town of Markham, Ontario, to test the key. Residents can receive two free keys to try, and then bring the vented cylinders to one of Markham's recycling centres rather than the hazardous household waste site.

For more information, visit [www.colemancanada.ca](http://www.colemancanada.ca).

## MHSW Phase 2 to include IC&I small quantity generators

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In addition to calling for stewards to fully fund the program, Minister Gerretsen requests that the WDO plan:

- include a range of collection options to increase consumer access
- expand the scope of the program to include certain waste from all industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) generators (household-style batteries)
- include most MHSW-type waste from ICI small quantity generators
- explore management options for lead-acid batteries and submit a report with recommendations
- incorporate the Recycling Council of Ontario's new Take Back the

Light scheme for fluorescent bulbs (see page 7/8).

### WASTES COVERED IN PHASE 2 & 3

Wastes to be included in Phase 2 include household-style batteries, aerosol containers, fire extinguishers, fluorescent light bulbs and tubes, mercury-containing switches and thermometers, pharmaceuticals, and syringes. Phase 3 will see the program expanded to manage all remaining MHSW outlined in the regulation.

For more information visit the Stewardship Ontario website, [www.stewardshipontario.ca](http://www.stewardshipontario.ca).

## NS cities see \$7.8 million

Nova Scotia municipalities received \$7.8 million in funding from the province's Resource Recovery Fund (RRF) at the end of June.

The funding, 60.5% of RRF Nova Scotia's net revenue, is used to offset the cost of curbside collection programs, household hazardous waste collection, promotion and education campaigns, and other municipal waste services.

Over the 12 years RRF Nova Scotia has been in operation, municipalities have received over \$81 million in funding support.

For more information on the funding, and to read RRF Nova Scotia's 2008 annual report, visit [www.rafb.com](http://www.rafb.com).

## The silly season is upon us....

A packaging (well, actually labeling) innovation, developed by Molson Coors last year is being heavily promoted this summer.

A special paint used on the Coors Light labels turns colour when it chills to a certain temperature, advising the drinker, presumably, when it's time to drink.

Well-known for their marketing genius in non-discriminating markets, the brewery's labels are expected to increase sales in some sectors, particularly those that forget it is actually the beer they are consuming, not the label.

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## “EPIC” BATTLE DEVELOPING

# We're greener than paper bags says plastic industry in new campaign

The plastics industry is launching a new marketing campaign to extol the virtues of plastic versus paper. And the paper industry is not happy.

On June 23, the Environment and Plastics Industry Council (EPIC) held a half-day meeting in Toronto for the plastic packaging industry, suppliers and retailers, to outline the new campaign. EPIC, a council of the Canadian Plastics Industry Association (CPIA) feels plastic packaging is “under attack in Canada” and “the critics are gaining ground.” Public opinion, it notes, is “increasingly anti-plastic.”

Representatives from PR POST, an agency that specializes in “building and protecting of the corporate brand,” were scheduled to present the packaging campaign at the meeting. The campaign is, in part, in response to the Ontario government’s announcement in late May that the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) was discontinuing the use of plastic bags.

### EPIC: PAPER BAGS ARE THE BAD GUY

A 20-slide presentation was distributed widely by EPIC in July .

“Plastic bags were introduced in

1977 as a more environmentally friendly alternative to the tree hungry paper bag,” states the first slide in the presentation.

It goes on to quote several studies that it says show, “plastic is superior environmentally to paper.”

The presentation also states that 50% of plastic shopping bags are re-used for household garbage, and that the number of bags being recycled is increasing, with BC recycling 35% and Nova Scotia recycling 45%.

The presentation says industry is working to develop recycling certifications standards for plastic shopping bags, and to clearly label each shopping bag as recyclable.

### PAPER PACKAGING FIGHTS BACK

“We’re getting a bit tired of this distraction campaign, frankly,” said John Mullinder, executive director of the Paper and Packaging Environmental Council (PPEC), in a July 22 news release.

He calls on the plastics industry to “get its own act together.”

The plastic industry association leadership “takes cheap shots at paper” rather than dealing with issues like litter, the amount of plastic landfilled and health concerns, says PPEC.

“It seems like every time something

goes badly for the plastics industry that it lashes out at paper.”

PPEC disputes the scientific life-cycle studies put out by the plastic industry that claim plastic packaging is superior to paper, saying that many of the studies are commissions by the plastic industry itself and have little relevance to current Canadian circumstances.

In Canada, PPEC notes, paper bags are made from wood chips, shavings and sawdust left over from logging and sawmilling operations (the lumber being used to for construction).

PPEC would welcome a credible analysis “that recognizes the environmental impact of manufacturing polymers from oil and natural gas and shipping plastic resin and/or bags all the way from coal-dependent China.”

“Perhaps we should talk about ‘oil-hungry’ plastics,” suggests Mr. Mullinder.

### OPINION PIECE

The latest exchange between the plastics and paper industry associations, follows an opinion piece in *Plastic News* in May by former CPIA head Serge Lavoie.

“While industry deals with fact, science and well-reasoned arguments,” writes Mr. Lavoie, “our detractors routinely use factoids, pseudo-science and fear mongering, all of which are easier to report and to understand for the lay person.”

Industry, he says, “doesn’t have the luxury of using those tactics, not if we want to hang on to our credibility and our political capital.”

## Applications sought from Ontario municipalities

The make-up of the Continuous Improvement Fund (CIF), which replaces the Efficiency & Effectiveness Fund, was featured at the Stewardship Ontario’s Spring 2008 Ontario Recycler Workshop in June. The new board consists of:

- Ontario municipalities (1 from AMO and 1 from City of Toronto)
- Stewardship Ontario (2)
- independent member-at-large (1)
- a non-voting independent Chair
- observers from WDO (Executive Director) and CIF (Director).

The board will provide oversight to project and its \$13 million budget.

The CIF is currently accepting grant and loan applications from municipalities that wish to undertake projects to maximize the efficiency of the Blue Box program. A new online application system will soon be available.

For more information visit [www.stewardshipontario.ca](http://www.stewardshipontario.ca).

## NEW BOARD TAKES OVER

# Recycle New Brunswick oversees provincial stewardship programs

Recycle New Brunswick, the province's newly formed stewardship board, anticipates that collection and recycling of waste paint should start across the province in the fall of 2008. The exact drop-off site locations are to be determined by industry in their management plan.

The new board took over product stewardship initiatives as of May 1. Recycle New Brunswick is now responsible for overseeing the province's new waste paint stewardship program and will take responsibility for the existing tire stewardship program, which has been running for the past 12 years under the Tire Stewardship Board. Members of the board are now members of Recycle New Brunswick's board.

"The establishment of this board creates a level playing field for all brand owners, and relieves taxpayers of the responsibility of stewards costs for certain products," said Environment

Minister Roland Haché in an April 30 press release.

### MORE MATERIALS?

The same press release hints at more materials falling under product stewardship regulations in the future, saying that eventually Recycle New Brunswick may oversee programs for oil, electronics, batteries, mercury-containing devices, and pharmaceuticals.

Paint brand owners were required to register with Recycle New Brunswick within 30 days, and to individually or jointly propose stewardship plans for their products within 90 days (of May 1).

The province defines "paint" as both oil and latex architectural paints and stains, and paints and stains sold in aerosol containers.

Product Care, a not-for-profit industry association, is in the process of developing a paint stewardship program on behalf of its members in the province. Product Care currently manages

stewardship programs in British Columbia (paint, flammable liquids, pesticides and gasoline), Nova Scotia (paint) and Saskatchewan (paint and electronics). The group is also involved in Ontario's new Municipal Hazardous and Special Waste program.

For more information, visit [www.recyclenb.com](http://www.recyclenb.com) and/or [www.productcare.org](http://www.productcare.org).

## Media says no bag ban in Vancouver

Following a two-day, invitation-only symposium on packaging, it looks like Metro Vancouver will not move ahead with a ban on plastic shopping bags.

The *Surrey North Delta Leader* reported June 11 that, "No clear consensus in favour of a ban emerged [at the symposium] and many participants said they see more effective ways to try to cut the waste stream."

The symposium was to examine the policy tools available to regulate retail packaging, including industry-lead programs, taxes and bans.

Staff at Metro Vancouver have been directed by the Metro Vancouver Waste Management Committee to present a possible plan for managing plastic bags in the region.

## LCBO undermining glass—O-I

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"For over 2 years, writes Mr. Stroucken, "The LCBO has been aggressively encouraging—and in some cases effectively forcing—our customers ...to switch from using glass packaging to so-called alternative materials such as plastic and aseptic cartons."

He says the LCBO has not produced any "credible, validated third party assessment" of the claims it is making.

"Rather is has chosen to engage in what can only be described as an anti-glass campaign using communications materials and 'facts' developed by producers of alternative packaging," writes Mr. Stroucken.

"We were recently advised that as a result of commercial pressure by the LCBO, a major beverage alcohol

producer in Ontario is switching from competitively priced glass packaging to plastic bottles."

The company "understands" the LCBO is seeking other such conversions.

"We are at a loss to understand why the LCBO," writes the O-I CEO, "Is aggressively promoting alternative packaging with inherently low recovery and recycling rates when those rates will undermine what is proving to be a highly effective package recovery system."

In its July 29 announcement of the Toronto plant's closure, Scott Murchison, O-I's president, North America Glass Containers, said the market impacts of a strong Canadian dollar, high energy prices and the recent activities of the Liquor Control Board of Ontario were "contributing factors" in the decision .

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## Canadian waste disposal rates increase

The amount of waste disposed in public and private disposal facilities increased from 25.2 to 27.2 million tonnes—an 8% increase—between 2004 and 2006.

The findings were released in June by Statistics Canada as part of its biennial Waste Management Industry Survey: Business and Government Sectors. Among the report's other key findings:

- Residential waste disposal increased 3%, compared to an 11% increase in non-residential sources.
- About one-third of waste for disposal comes from the residential sector, with the remained two-thirds coming from the non-residential sector.
- Diversion rates per capita increased from 222 kg to 237 kg, with New Brunswick seeing the highest increase (82%).
- Canada's overall diversion rate remained steady at 22%.
- Materials for recycling increased 9%. Materials for recycling from residential sources increased 11%, compared to 7% from non-residential sources.
- Materials for composting increased 32%.
- Businesses engaged in waste management saw a revenue increase of 17% during the period, while their operating expenditures increased by 12%.
- Municipalities saw their operating revenues increase 16% to just over \$1.0 billion in 2006. The total expenditures by municipalities increased from \$1.8 to \$2.0 billion.

The full report is available on the Statistics Canada website, [www.statcan.ca](http://www.statcan.ca), catalogue number 16F0023XWE.

## ICI fluorescent lamp recycling program

On July 18, the Recycling Council of Ontario unveiled what it is calling "Canada's first and only comprehensive fluorescent lamp recycling program for the industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI) sector."

The *Take Back the Light* program aims to recover the 30 million fluorescent lights disposed of in the province annually, ten times the number recovered currently. That could lead to the recycling of 312 kilograms of mercury.

The program is funded by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment. In the press release, Environment Minister John Gerretsen said, "It's the kind of project we need in Ontario: one that sees the public and private sectors working together to create a healthier future; one that considers the benefits of addressing end of life solutions for common products."

The Ontario Government is committed to the *Take Back the Light* program and will roll it out to all government owned and operated facilities over the next four years.

Businesses wishing to get involved in the program can register on-line. Costs will vary depending on the number of lamps produced, but the RCO claims that participation will guarantee the best price in Ontario for recycling lamps.

For more information, visit [www.takebackthelight.ca](http://www.takebackthelight.ca).

## COMING EVENTS

### August 24—27

Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference  
Ottawa, Ontario  
(416) 971-9856 ext. 330  
[www.amo.on.ca](http://www.amo.on.ca)

### September 10—12

Ontario East Municipal Conference  
Kingston, Ontario  
(613) 925-1498  
[www.omec.ca](http://www.omec.ca)

### September 17—19

Composting Council of Canada National Conference  
Château Mont-Sainte-Anne, Quebec  
(416) 535-0240  
[www.compost.org](http://www.compost.org)

### September 22—26

Union of British Columbia Municipalities Convention  
Penticton, British Columbia  
(604) 270-8226  
[www.civicnet.bc.ca](http://www.civicnet.bc.ca)

### October 8—10

Recycling Council of Alberta Conference  
Jasper, Alberta  
(403) 843-6563  
[www.recycle.ab.ca](http://www.recycle.ab.ca)

### October 21

Ontario Waste Minimization Awards  
Toronto, Ontario  
(416) 657-2797  
[www.rco.on.ca](http://www.rco.on.ca)

### October 22—24

AMRC Fall Conference  
Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario  
(519) 823-1990  
[www.amrc.ca](http://www.amrc.ca)

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# Opinion Piece

*The opinions expressed in this column are not necessarily those of PPSReview*

## How poor PR advice is perpetuating plastic's persecution

By Jay Arthur

You have to figure that the people who represent the plastics industry have a much harder job than the paper people.

Plastic don't get no respect.

From being the wonder kid of modern civilization, along with the gas that powered booming economies, plastic has become the whipping boy.

Paper on the other hand, has gone from the product of dirty mills that polluted lakes to an organic, Canadian-made material that is sustainable.

What happened?

Firstly, people have made the connection that plastic comes from oil. And let's face it, oil is icky stuff. Whenever it is on the news it's bad news. The Exxon Valdez man-made disaster sent photographs of oil-covered birds and ruined landscapes across the world and every time we have a war in the Middle East someone blows up an oil well and it's show time again.

Add to that the growing concerns about what exactly may be leaching out of some plastics and there are more bad news stories.

The irony here of course is that you really cannot blame all this on the plastic bag.

People don't fight wars to protect their plastic bag source. The ability to make bags was a side benefit of the oil discovery, not a driver.

And what a great product the plastic bag is! There is no denying it. The thing is a work of art. It is cheap. It is light and it is impervious.

If the folks who starred in *The Gods Must Be Crazy* thought a Coke bottle was a thing of beauty, imagine what they would have had to say about a plastic bag.

Unfortunately it is the very lack of substance that makes a plastic bag so economical is also its downfall. It's lightness makes it a poster boy for litter campaigns.

Now the industry can bury you in facts and figures that show that plastic bags are only small part of litter, but they are the ones carrying the rap.

Litter is very much an aesthetic issue in North America, more of an aggravation and a nuisance.

But in the developing world it can be a major safety hazard, blocking flood control infrastructure and providing a less than nutritious snack food for wild

**Instead of starting a dissing match with the paper industry, they would be better served to build on the good work they are doing to encourage paper bag recycling through the in-store take-back programs.**

animals, many of whom die as a result of the meal.

How many times this actually happens is not known but it only takes a few pictures of some cute wildlife choking on plastic to enshrine the image forever in people's imaginations.

And we've seen what flooding can do.

At this point, the reality of the matter is not important. Countries in Africa and Asia have taken steps to counter plastic bag usage, so that tends to add credibility to the argument that they are a problem, whatever response industry may come up with.

In this country, we do not have any dire consequences from plastic bags, but they still remain a convenient target.

There is no question that the Ontario Premier's decision to take centre stage in announcing the phasing out of plastic bags at LCBO stores was all about gaining greenie points. (A pretty

mundane event in the overall scheme of things, but something has to offset the nuclear power expansion stories.)

Leaning on the LCBO to show some sense on the deposit issue was good leadership given the size of the LCBO packaging budget and its management's tenacious blindness to the environmental benefits of removing booze bottles from the sacred blue box. So it might be argued this is a follow-up to that.

It does tie in with the provincial moves to get the industry to do something about packaging, and the phasing out of plastic bags at liquor stores was likely a good way to show that the Province is serious.

But you can understand the plastics guys feeling a bit out of sorts and a little paranoid about being picked on so much.

I am not sure, however, that the advice they seem to be getting from their public relations

people is serving them well.

Instead of starting a dissing match with the paper industry, they would be better served to build on the good work they are doing to encourage plastic bag recycling through the in-store take-back programs.

Their own studies have shown these programs can be profit centres and if consumers know they can take the bags bag back, they will feel better (and less guilty) about using them.

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