

PPSReview

MANAGING WASTE RESPONSIBLY

**Product & Packaging
Stewardship Review**

**An information service for municipal governments
Vol 9, Issue 4, February 2010**

Ontario municipalities want full EPR, wherever waste ends up

CALL FOR 100% OF RECYCLING, ORGANICS, WASTE COSTS

Ontario's municipalities are calling for 100% of the costs of dealing with residual waste to be covered by stewards, regardless of where the materials in question end up.

In a submission to Ontario's Environment Ministry, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Regional Public Works Commissioners of Ontario (RPWCO) and the Municipal Waste Association (MWA) support the Minister's recommendations to have individual producers fully and financially responsible for diverting their share of

designated materials from landfill.

They were responding to the Minister's report, *Zero Waste Future: Review of the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 (EBR #010-8164)*. The comment period closed February 1.

SUPPORTIVE OF FULL RESPONSIBILITY

In their nine-page submission the groups add that, "this responsibility should extend to all materials produced, even if they end up in residual waste or source separated organics."

While they support the flexibility in developing and delivering the plan afforded by the Minister's report, the municipalities qualify that position by saying flexibility cannot come at the expense of residents' access to convenient recycling or current residential diversion rates.

They are also concerned that "fragmentation of the collection system," which could result from a flexible program, would lead to resident confusion and diminished program participation rates.

Other specific comments on the implementation of individual producer responsibility include:

- the full and immediate development of a transition plan to ensure resident convenience and program success is maintained.

BC stewardship expands Province adds antifreeze, vehicle batteries

Changes made to British Columbia's Recycling Regulation in December will see lead-acid batteries and antifreeze added to the list of products to be managed and paid for by product stewards.

Stewardship management plans for both products are due to the Ministry of Environment by October 1 of this year, with programs rolling out by July 2011.

It is anticipated that the BC Used Oil Management Association will submit a plan for dealing with antifreeze. BC's existing lead-acid battery program,

currently managed by Ministry staff, will change to a product stewardship model.

The amendments to the regulation also extended timelines for products under the electronic stewardship plan. Small appliances and smoke detectors stewards must submit their plan by July, with roll-out by April 2011. Stewards of large appliances (white goods), tools, and sports and leisure equipment, among others, are expected to have plans to the Ministry by October of next year, with roll-out by July 2012.

For more information see www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/recycling/.

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Briefly...

BUDGET WOES KILL 25-CENT BAG TAX IN CALIFORNIA

A proposed 25-cent tax on single-use plastic and paper bags was killed by legislators in late January because of state budgetary pressures. The cost of implementing the tax was estimated at \$300,000, with annual enforcement costs pegged at \$1 million. Environmental groups hope to convince state legislators to consider a smaller 5-cent or 10-cent tax on plastic bags. Berkeley and Marin County are among several cities and counties considering their own bans on the bags, adding to the growing roster of municipalities taking steps to manage single-use bags. California is not alone in considering state-wide initiatives to reduce single-ban use. Florida had been considering a state-wide ban on plastic and paper bags, but backed down from that proposal in early February. Virginia and Maryland have introduced proposals to place a 5-cent tax on single-use bags. Such a tax would be similar to one that came into effect in the District of Columbia on January 1 of this year. Much like in California, Maryland and Virginia are facing budget shortfalls, so start-up and enforcement costs associated with the tax may see the proposals stopped in their tracks. In Maryland, annual enforcement costs have been estimated at \$200,000. However the state could see annual revenue from the tax as high as \$4 million, if bag use continues at its current rate. That is unlikely—the District of Columbia has seen single-bag use drop by half since the 5-cent tax took effect.

Plastic News.com, January 26, 2010

CLOROX NEW WEBSITE LISTS “INGREDIENTS INSIDE”

The Clorox Company launched a new corporate social responsibility (CSR) website February 1, 2010, www.cloroxcsr.com. The site includes product ingredient listings for more than 230 Clorox products sold in US and Canada, including major household brands for cleaning, disinfecting and auto care and information on commercial products. A glossary of terms explains the function of each produce ingredient. The site also features other aspects of Clorox’s commitment to CSR—people, performance, planet and purpose.

Clorox, February 1, 2010
investors.thecloroxcompany.com/newsroom.cfm

HANDS UP AND RECYCLE YOUR WEAPON

Scotland Yard, the UK’s largest police force, accumulated more than 52 tonnes of scrap metal in its 2009 fiscal year. The metal, in the form of guns, knives and keys, may be recycled for use at the site of the 2012 London Olympic games. The London police force is also tackling the 3Rs. More than 3.3 million spent bullets from its firing ranges were sold off to make photo frames and jewellery. The force also recycles body armour (which goes into the production of cars), cooking oil and horse manure.

Recycling International, January 5, 2010
RecyclingBiz.com

COKE TO ROLL OUT 2 BILLION PLANT-BASED PET BOTTLES BY END OF YEAR

The Coca-Cola launched its plant-based PET bottle, PlantBottle™, in November of last year, with an eye to produce 2 billion of the bottles by the end of 2010. PlantBottle is made from PET plastic resin made partially from plant residues, particularly sugar cane and molasses, by-products of sugar production or in some cases, ethanol. While the plant-based part can account for up to 30% of the PET plastic, recycled PET can make up a large component. The first PlantBottles, released in Denmark, were made of 15% plant-based materials, and 50% recycled PET. Coca-Cola is rolling out the introduction of the bottles in select markets, with Western Canada seeing the bottles introduced in December 2001, in time for the Vancouver Olympics Games.

Coca-Cola Company, November 16, 2009
www.thecoca-colacompany.com

BOTTLE DEPOSITS: NO EFFECT ON SALES

Sales are not affected deposit-return systems—at least not in Japan. So finds a study by that country’s Ministry of the Environment to test a deposit system for mineral water sold in returnable plastic bottles. The results of the study, released in August 2009, found an average return rate of 78.59%, with collection rates for sales in shops lower than rates for home delivery sales (50.63 versus 95.37%). They study also suggested that carbon dioxide emissions from bottle reuse in limited areas is lower than that of recycling, provided the collection rate is more than 90%.

Japan for Sustainability, December 18, 2009
www.japanfs.org/en/pages/029577.html

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Current and past issues of PPSReview are available for viewing on the Internet (www.productstewardship.org).

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

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Ontario MHSW stewards fees to drop

SOLVENT, PAINT, PRESSURIZED CONTAINERS CHARGED LESS

For the next few months at least, corporate stewards for solvents, paint and pressurized containers will see a reduction in their Municipal Hazardous or Special Waste (MHSW) fees.

Fees for solvents are seeing the biggest change, dropping by \$0.24 to

\$0.20 per litre. Paints and coatings will drop by \$0.02 to \$0.65 for containers between 1 and 5 litres, with larger containers dropping by \$0.09 to \$3.32. Pressurized containers will drop between \$0.06 and \$1.17 per container.

Stewardship Ontario has reduced

the fees as a result of updated forecasts. The new fees will be in effect until June 30, 2010.

Bulked antifreeze fees are being deferred until the Consolidated Municipal Hazardous or Special Waste Program begins on July 1, 2010.

For more information, visit www.stewardshipontario.ca.

Municipalities: ensure fair pay for assets, contracts, under revised WDA

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- that diversion rates for industrial, commercial and institutional (IC&I) programs not lag behind residential targets and timelines.
- that the Province work with the federal government to develop a nation-wide extended producer responsibility (EPR) program for packaging and printed papers, and a nation-wide strategy for sustainable packaging. (*Editor's note: The Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment are working on both these fronts.*)

ORGANICS NOW, CARS LATER

In their submission, municipalities call for branded organics to be considered a higher priority material, with stewardship to be implemented within three years.

Further, the municipalities call for branded organics to be eligible for full cost recovery, whether through a blue box or green bin program.

As vehicles are not a priority for municipalities, the submission states that implementation of this category not be at the expense of delaying other categories for designation.

TRANSITIONING TO THE NEW FRAMEWORK

As some municipalities are delaying capital and operational improvements due to uncertainty surrounding changes to the Act, the submission recommends

that transition planning begin as soon as possible, and not be delayed until the introduction of the revised Act.

There are also two recommendations dealing with the financial considerations for municipalities under the plan:

- 1) Municipal assets stranded as a result of this plan should be assessed and appropriately compensated for, based on a number of factors, including the value of the Certificate of Approval, infrastructure and operational equipment, and the land value, which includes appropriate Official Plan designation and zoning.
- 2) Municipal collection, processing and disposal contracts stranded or shortened as a result of this plan should be assessed and compensated for, based on a number of factors, including the value of the contract, fines and penalties that may arise as a result of shortened contracts.

Supportive of a five-year transition to full EPR for blue box materials, the municipalities recommend that a single steward organization for residential printed paper and packaging, with decision making power that can speak on behalf of the stewards, be identified. This body would work with municipalities during the transition to full EPR.

WHAT'S NEXT?

With comments due by February 1, 2010, the fate of the proposed changes to the WDA are back on Minister Gerretsen's desk. Now we wait.

SO's Blue Box Plan posted

Stewardship Ontario (SO) has posted a *Draft Preliminary Revised Blue Box Program Plan* for review by stewards and stakeholders. Comments on the draft are due by March 3, 2010.

The plan is being revised in response to a letter from the Minister of the Environment, which sets a new provincial recycling rate target of 70% by 2011.

Major changes in the revised plan include:

- expanding the definition of printed paper and packaging to include additional paper and packaging materials, such as aluminum pie plates, that are compatible with current collection and management systems;
- revising the methodology for calculating diversion by including additional quantities of residential waste collected through non-municipal systems; and
- measures and costs associated with achieving the 70% target.

To view the draft plan, visit www.stewardshipontario.org/bluebox.

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What kind of blue box program will be left when industry takes over?

Last summer, a PPSReview “In depth” piece looked at what might happen to the recycling system and the materials it collects when industry takes over. This article looks at the viability of the curbside system itself, given changes in markets.

To the relief of many on the municipal front, Ontario’s Environment Minister John Gerretsen kept his job in the recent cabinet shuffle.

While his intended move to 100% industry funding of Ontario’s blue box program has been confirmed many times by the minister, until it actually happens, municipal treasurers will not likely sleep well in their beds.

Given the existing “shared responsibility” approach envisioned in the old Waste Diversion Act, the blue box seemed an unlikely contender for such treatment.

But the report that accompanied the recent review of the Act makes it pretty clear that this is what the Province has in mind. The consultation was really more about how it would happen.

The timing of this switch in responsibilities comes at a time when there are several large clouds hanging over Ontario’s curbside recycling system.

There are two main reasons for this troubling forecast: the addition of so many more materials and the way we collect them. And both of these have made the job of the blue box material marketer very difficult. The quality has gone and our competition in this market place has a much cleaner product.

FIBRE RECOVERY HAS BEEN STRONG

While it has never been close to competing with the old bottle deposit-return system for container recovery performance, the blue box has done fairly well on the fibre side. The good

recovery rates for old newspapers were often enough to boost the average rate to about half. This was enough for all concerned to bury their heads in the sand whenever concern was expressed about how well the blue box was performing.

As a way to motivate people to return containers, the deposit has always proved to be more effective, even if the idea of take-back at stores puts retailers into a cold sweat.

It is interesting that a similar debate is going on in Quebec (see Page 6 of this issue of *PPSReview*).

Ironically, from once being the inefficient, high-cost pariah, the blue box is now touted as the be-and-end-all by industry players now they are

faced with paying the full shot. They even want to move beverage containers from the existing, efficient deposit system and put them in Quebec’s blue box.

In response, the Quebec government has challenged them to demonstrate that the blue box can achieve the same diversion numbers as the deposit-return system at a lower cost. If they can (and watch carefully for the launch of the Creative Accounting Olympics), the mandatory deposits will be removed from beverage containers except beer.

BLUE BOX DOING BETTER

For all its problems, the blue box system is actually doing a lot better in the recovery department than it did in the past.

Thanks to some substantial investments in sorting and processing technology, the very poor recovery rates for some materials like hard-to-recycle plastics are creeping up.

At the curb the move from multi-stream collection to two-stream collection and now to single-stream collection has seen a substantial increase in the tonnages collected.

But here’s the rub.

While everyone is happy to see the increase in diversion rates, there has been a marked reduction in the quality of the product coming out of the back door of the recycling plant. And this is really hurting Ontario’s blue box program.

In addition to a large increase in residue (i.e., garbage) coming out of that same back door, cross contamination is taking its toll.

Recent reports have confirmed what a lot of people have feared about the whole single-stream approach. We are paying heavily for our efforts to increase convenience at the curb for the householder.

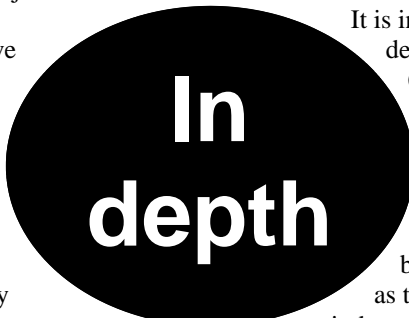
In the late 1980s, recycling programs were frequently visited by garbage alchemists who claimed to be able to put mixed waste in one end of a system and take out gold from the other end. Few bought it then, but it could be argued that the single-stream approach is really a modified version of that. To be fair, however, increased diversion was really the selling point rather than a glistering end product.

BREAD AND BUTTER MATERIALS

Since Day One, the blue box has had its prime materials, its bread-and-butter materials and what might be considered its non-paying passengers.

Aluminum has always been by far the highest-value product and newsprint and steel have always been a steady revenue source, given their volume. Adding steady but usually reliable solid income have been PET and HDPE bottles.

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Increased diversion, but at what cost?

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All of these except HDPE were part of the original blue box team, along with glass, which was unspectacular but, in those days, easily sold in high enough volumes to yield a half-decent revenue.

Over the next several years, a whole host of other materials were added—not to all programs, but to most—and while this did increase the diversion, it did little for the bottom line. Indeed, in some cases, it piled up more and more costs as we struggled for ways to make them fit the system.

Of all the materials added since the original blue box days, only two, HDPE and cardboard (old corrugated containers—OCC), can be considered a revenue source of any consequence. Indeed, most of them have been liabilities. To further drag down revenues all those extra materials are finding their way into the bales of the high-value material we ship to market.

FUSSIER AND FUSSIER

The people who buy aluminum for making new cans are getting fussier and fussier about the quality of the materials they buy. Penalties and load rejections are frequent. Ontario material recovery facilities (MRFs) are competing with clean, uncontaminated deposit-grade aluminum cans from other jurisdictions. Our ability to match those high standards is not helped by the increasing appearance of foil, aluminum trays, cat foods tins and other non-used beverage containers that end up in bales sent to these high paying mills.

Aluminum being aluminum, there are usually other buyers, but it means taking a substantial hit on the price paid. More sorting technology may address some of these quality issues, but at what point does the cost of all these Band-aids cry out for another look at why we collect this material together?

It is the same story with the second best recycling revenue stream: newspapers (ONP). Very few MRFs are shipping a true #8 bale (i.e. pure newsprint) anymore. Over the years, the proportion of ONP in the fibre stream has been getting smaller and smaller. We were already collecting a lot of the available newsprint, so most of the added fibre is not such a high quality. Added to that is the

reduction in the dimensions of newspapers themselves (and a depressed economy means thinner papers as advertisers pull back).

The mills have noted this trend with alarm over the years and the advent of single-stream collection and the added cross-contamination it brings with it have merely exacerbated an already serious problem. The competition from Chinese mills has forced those Ontario and Quebec mills that are still in business to put up with this, but relying on overseas markets as local ones die off is not sustainable.

IT MAY NOT BE PET

When PET bottles were the only plastic in the blue box, they were easily sorted and a clean stream was shipped to market. Now we have plastic trays which are eminently recyclable and all look the same but they may or may not actually be PET. So the markets don't want them with the bottles. And now there are PET bottle look-alikes made from materials that act as contaminants in the PET processing system. Again, sorting technology is being developed that will be able to save the day, or so we are told. More Band-aids.

Steel seems to be the only market where we haven't compromised the product quality. Prices have been up and down of late, in keeping with the economy, but this was to be expected.

Like steel, the market for OCC usually follows the economy. Ontario no longer has a pure boxboard market so it needs to be mixed with other fibres, usually OCC, dragging down the price.

HDPE has proved to be a fairly steady participant in the blue box and its market ups and downs are usually reflected in prices paid for tubs and lids.

All the other materials have always been or have become a problem.

The polycoat and aseptic markets have been spotty, although the promise of new markets in Quebec is encouraging. The economics and cross-contamination challenges of collecting polystyrene foam and film have led Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO) to suggest they do not belong in the blue box but would be better served by a depot system (*Report on Greater Consistency of Recyclable Material Collection, Draft for Consultation, November 17, 2009*).

In that same report, however, WDO is suggesting more material be added overall to the blue boxes across Ontario, not less.

LOOK HARD AND LONG

If industry gets the control it wants after picking up the tab for Ontario's blue box system, it may want to look hard and long at how other materials might be collected and how that might affect the bottom line.

Perhaps we will see a return to the old days, i.e. collection the good stuff—aluminum, steel, newspapers, OCC and plastic bottles—at the curb, and take-back for the rest. It could be in the store, depots, "bottle bank" style street containers—whatever works. Industry has the innovation and resources to make it work. And the extra cash from the clean blue box materials would likely go a long way to offsetting the cost.

Something should be done soon, before our lucrative aluminum and newspaper markets are gone forever.

Steel seems to be the only market where we haven't compromised the product quality.

Quebec plan focused on stewardship

100% FOR PACKAGING & PAPERS, WEEE STEWARDSHIP & MORE

Product stewardship is the cornerstone to suite of new waste regulations in Quebec.

As noted in the November 2009 edition of *PPSReview*, the Province of Quebec is making sweeping changes to its approach to waste reduction.

Quebec's Residual Materials Management Policy was issued on November 16, 2009, by the Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks, Line Beauchamp. The policy follows on the heels of the waste management action plan for the preceding decade (1998-2008), which feel short of its stated goals.

Several initiatives are kick-starting the new plan, including:

- the introduction of a new stewardship plan for electronics, batteries, fluorescent lamps and mercury containing lamps;
- a doubling of the provincial surcharge on waste going to landfill; and
- an estimated \$650 million committed to building organics recovery systems.

GREEN ECONOMY

The Residual Materials Management Policy is adopted as part of Quebec's commitment to sustainable development and the promotion of a green economy. Over 13 million tons of residual materials are produced annually in the province, which the government says holds "undeniable potential for both manufacturing and energy production."

The government cites the 10,000 direct jobs related to recycling only 2.5 million tons of materials in 2006.

The province aims to create a zero-waste society. To meet this goal, the new policy includes measures to address three main challenges:

- ending resource waste —the government sets quantifiable targets for specific materials to be managed, including recycling 70% of paper, plastic, glass and metal waste and processing 60% of organics by 2015;
- promoting the goals of the Climate Change Action Plan and the Quebec Energy Strategy; and
- making all stakeholders involved responsible for residual materials management.

WEEE IS FIRST

In November, the Regulation Respecting the Recovery and Reclamation of Products by Enterprises was published in the *Gazette Officielle du Québec*.

The regulation amends existing stewardship programs in the province for oil and paint, and makes the producers of waste electronics and electrical equipment (WEEE) responsible for end-of-life management. Batteries, fluorescent lamps and mercury containing lamps are also among the first materials to require stewardship programs. Specific targets are set for recovery rates of each item.

It is anticipated that the WEEE regulations, once passed into law this spring, are just the starting point for product stewardship, with other materials being added annually.

The province has made it clear that it will prohibit the imposition of stewardship fees at the retail, requiring the stewards to internalize the costs. Tires, which currently have a \$3 fee, will see that retail fee phased out.

BLUE BOX STEWARDS UP TO 100% NET COSTS

Currently in Quebec, stewards of packaging and printed materials are required to pay 50% of net municipal costs. The new policy will see that increased to 100%.

The province's successful deposit-return system remains intact for the time being, with the province challenging bottlers to show that they can achieve the same diversion rates, at a lower cost, through the blue box before the mandatory deposits will be removed (with the exception of beer).

LANDFILL FEES TO GO ORGANICS

The move to increase landfill fees, and eventually ban specific materials from landfill, has been set to narrow the gap between disposal and diversion costs. Landfill surcharges currently stand at \$10.67 per tonne. An additional \$9.50 per tonne surcharge, set to last five years, will be given to municipalities to build infrastructure for managing organics.

For more information, visit www.mddep.gouv.qc.ca/matieres/pgmr/index.htm (documents in French).

Recycling rates increase in La Belle Province

Quebeckers recycled more and threw out less in 2008.

A new report by RECYC-QUÉBEC, *Bilan 2008 de la gestion des matières résiduelles au Québec* (2008 Progress Report on Residual Materials Management in Quebec), found a 7% decline in the elimination of residual waste between 2006 and 2008, the largest observed in Quebec over the past ten years.

Recovery of recyclable materials covered by the province's Compensation Plan for municipal curbside services (packaging, paper, containers) grew by 5% between 2006 and 2008, to 56%.

The report was based on two studies looking to provide background information on the types of residual materials in the residential sector, public places, and the commercial sector in Quebec.

These reports, in French only, are available at www.recyc-quebec.gouv.qc.ca.

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OES to increase collection incentive?

Municipalities have been complaining for sometime that the \$165 per tonne collection incentive paid by Ontario Electronic Stewardship (OES) does not cover the cost of receiving, storing and packing waste electronics.

According to the Waste Diversion Ontario board meeting minutes from January 27, 2010, OES is reviewing payment levels. It was noted that an activity based costing study currently under way will provide OES with information to revise the current collection incentive of \$165 per tonne to a range of fees for collection services up to \$290 per tonne.

OES was asked about the amounts paid by non-OES collectors and how these amounts compare to the \$165 per tonne collection incentive paid by OES. Based on anecdotal information, these organizations are paying 32 cents to 35 cents per pound. It should be noted these other collectors are interested in the items with high commodity value (e.g. circuit boards) but will accept other electronics to get access to the preferred items. The price paid fluctuates with the price of gold and copper.

In response to a question regarding the timing of revisions to the \$165 per tonne collection incentive, it was noted OES is expecting a report from their consultant in April.

MPSC's swan song

As they set to close their doors on March 31, 2010, the operators of the Manitoba Product Stewardship Corporation (MPSC) report the province recycled a record 70,338 tonnes of materials through MPSC-funded community collection programs in fiscal year 2008-2009.

Since its inception in 1995, more than 670,751,158 kg of household materials have been recycled through MPSC-funded programs. More information on MPSC's program is available in their recently-released Annual Report for 2008/09.

MPSC will cease regular operations on March 31. The recently formed Multi-Material Stewardship Manitoba (MMSM), responsible for implementing the mandate of the province's new Packaging and Printed Paper Stewardship Regulation, will take over at that time. MMSM can be found online at www.stewardshipmanitoba.org.

For a copy of the report, and information on the closure of MPSC, visit www.mpsc.com.

New CEO for EPSC

Shelagh Kerr is the new head of Electronics Product Stewardship Canada (EPSC).

Announced in early January, EPSC's new CEO and President brings to the position years of experience in government and public affairs. Ms Kerr served as the vice president of Corporate and Environmental Affairs for Coca-Cola in the 1990s, where she sat on the boards of recycling organizations in New Brunswick, Ontario and Alberta, as well as the federal Environmental Choice Program. Recently she has worked for Coca-Cola in Europe and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

EPSC is a not-for-profit organization focused on product stewardship for information technology and consumer electronics companies. For more information, visit www.epsc.ca.

COMING EVENTS

February 21—24

Rural Ontario Municipal Association/Ontario Good Roads Association Conference
Toronto, ON
(905) 795-2555
www.ogra.org

March 25—26

Saskatchewan Waste Reduction Council's Spring Waste Minimization Forum
Regina, SK
(306) 931-3242
www.saskwastereduction.ca

April 18—21

Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) Canadian Waste Symposium
Banff, AB
www.swananorthernlights.org

May 19—20

Municipal Waste Association's Spring Workshop
Hockley Valley, ON
(519) 823-1990
www.municipalwaste.ca

May 25—27

Recycling Council of British Columbia Annual Zero Waste Conference
Whistler, BC
(604) 683-6009, ext. 314
www.rcbc.ca.ca

Opinion Piece

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

It's time for municipalities to hand over the keys to the recycling truck

by Jay Arthur

After years of subsidizing industry for the cost of the blue box program, you might think Ontario's municipalities couldn't wait to hand it over to someone else. Apparently not.

In their response to the latest vision for the future of the blue box and related waste services, the municipalities are certainly supportive of the thrust to 100% industry responsibility, but they don't seem to be in too much of a hurry to relinquish control of the program.

In its February 1 submission to the Ontario Environment Minister John Gerretsen, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) says it's worried the "flexibility" industry has been calling for could lead to "fragmentation of the collection systems."

It does however, support the kind of flexibility that would give municipalities an opportunity to participate in the new system on a contract basis. That may make sense in places where staff are doing the work and they are keen to ensure that is maintained, but most programs contract out their operations.

AMO says it is concerned that compromising convenience and accessibility could lead to "resident confusion" and "diminished program participation."

If you look at the high recycling rates for some of the more well-known blue box materials like newspapers and cans, versus the rather poor rates for other materials, it's pretty clear there is already a substantial amount of resident confusion out there.

Even though many programs have been accepting plastics other than bottles and jugs for many years now, their recovery rates are still very low. It's the same for tetra paks and pie plates.

AMO seems to think that hanging on to the "convenience" of the current system is vital. I'm not so sure. Has anyone considered the possibility, I wonder, that Ontario programs have spent so much time trying to make everything waste-related in their residents' lives convenient that many of them have forgotten how to "do the right thing"?

Where I come from six out of 10 is not bad, but hardly "overwhelming." Nine out of 10 would be overwhelming. Eight out of 10 would be excellent. Seven out of 10 would be good, but with room for improvement after 20 years. Six out of 10? I'm sorry. I am not overwhelmed.

It's easy to look back fondly on the old days when recycling was sexy and everyone was urged to Be A Good Sort, but there's no denying the amount of stuff diverted from disposal through the program has increased substantially since the late 1980s.

The new collection methods where everything is dumped into one container were hailed as increasing convenience for the poor beleaguered resident, although one suspects lower collection costs were the real driver. And there is no question they increased volumes. Stewardship Ontario talks in almost giddy terms in its latest report about "overwhelming success" of the program, having surpassed 60% diversion.

Where I come from six out of 10 is not bad, but hardly "overwhelming." Nine out of 10 would be overwhelming. Eight out of 10 would be excellent. Seven out of 10 would be good, but with room for improvement after 20 years. Six out of 10? I'm sorry. I am not overwhelmed.

So let's not get too paranoid here about making changes.

And if I may continue the report

card metaphor, after 20 years I would be looking for signs that things are improving, with good prospects, and I'd be looking a lot more closely at the end uses of the materials collected. It shouldn't be hard to increase the number of tonnes recycled every year, given an increasing population and, until recently, a booming economy. That just means people are buying a lot of stuff (and the increasing disposal tonnages tell a similar story).

If you look at the revenues being paid for the blue box materials today, it is clear the reduced quality is having an impact on the bottom line. We're further away today than we have ever been from having the program be self-sustaining.

We also need to be taking a look at all the reasons for recycling we gave to our residents when we first asked them to separate their wastes 20 years ago. I am not sure there was too much talk of convenience, but there was a lot of talk about energy savings, maximizing the intrinsic value of the materials and recycling something into something of equal value, not grinding it up and using it for landfill cover, or pulping the heck out of it and landfilling it into a plastic picnic table.

If the private sector can turn that around, municipalities should hand over the keys and get ready to lecture industry about efficiency (and convenience), if they are so inclined.

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