

Are We Missing The Bigger Picture?

We continually hear municipalities and regions boast about the achievements of their waste management programs. They make comments such as – We are very pleased with how well this municipality's waste management program was accepted by the residential community.

The waste diversion rate of nearly 60 per cent indicates the quantity of residential curbside waste being diverted through recycling, source separated organics, and yard waste composting, in place of garbage disposal. This is an enormous change for the better. The increase in waste diversion is primarily credited to the achievements of the new Green Bin program, weekly blue box recycling, and biweekly garbage collection service.

The numbers show that the Green Bin and curbside recycling programs work and that our residents fully support them. The Region's waste diversion plans have decreased the number of residential garbage trucks traveling to Michigan. These are wonderful accomplishments; however, have we missed the bigger picture?

In June of 2004 the Ontario Government introduced a discussion paper as a possible solution to an expanding economy and a growing population that were placing additional demands on Ontario's natural resources and straining our ability to effectively manage the environmental impact of that growth. The provincial government proposed to take a new comprehensive approach to waste diversion, one that will reduce the amount of waste generated, increase the rates of reuse and recycling, and reduce the amount of waste going to disposal.

Achieving a 60% diversion rate by 2008 was an ambitious goal, but they believed it could be achieved, if everyone, Ontario residents, businesses, industry, manufacturers and packagers, waste management experts, and environmental experts, as well as municipalities and the provincial government commits to finding better waste management solutions. While the provincial government set the overall goal, it would be up to municipalities and the business and commercial sectors to determine how best to get there.

Currently, waste generation is almost equally split between the residential and IC&I sectors. Municipality's and the private sector's challenge is to determine how best to manage waste in a way that is sustainable and protective of the health and well being of communities and the environment. Effective ways to increase the waste diversion rate are likely to require new ways of working together, new ways of thinking, and new ways for all of us to participate in finding integrated solutions to our common problem of waste.

There are a number of factors that will help determine how successful municipalities and the private sector will be in reaching the collective 60% waste

diversion goal. Most importantly, everyone must be able to create a sense of ownership to manage our wastes differently than we do now. We will need to effectively address some of the obstacles to waste diversion, including a recognition that all sectors, private and public need to cooperate in an integrated way and to work together to solve regional waste challenges. The waste that is generated by all sectors within a municipality or a region is the responsibility of that municipality and/or region; all sectors both private and public need to work together.

We need not to boast of our individual accomplishment but rather to work together to find a collective solution to our common problem, waste.

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