

Getting to 75% and Beyond

Comments on
EPC's proposed Recycling Depot Initiatives
from Resource Conservation Manitoba (RCM)
for Winnipeg City Council, May 19, 2010

We wish to address the EPC-recommended resolution on Recycling Depot Initiatives.

RCM applauds the resolution's intent to address Manitoba's relatively poor waste diversion and container recovery rates. RCM also believes that, in addition to education and social marketing to promote conscientious behaviour, successful stewardship programs require regulation, enforcement, collection systems and incentives that make it easier and more rewarding to do the right thing and harder and less rewarding to do the wrong. So we are well-aligned with the intent of the resolution.

We do, however, have several observations and concerns about the resolution as it stands and recommend some changes.

1. Even if we got a 100% return on beverage containers, we still would lag other provinces if we did nothing else. Organics and commercial waste are much larger waste stream components that need to be addressed, totalling well over 50% of municipal waste. For example, Saskatchewan, with a deposit-return system, has a very high beverage container recovery rate of 85% overall, yet falls dead last behind even Manitoba in waste diversion. So we should have no illusions that even the most effective container recovery system will, by itself, solve Winnipeg's and Manitoba's waste reduction problems. In other words, the EPC resolution is no substitute for developing a comprehensive waste reduction plan for the city. We still await the Public Service report on setting up a planning process.
2. Nevertheless we do need targets and effective strategies for each component of the waste stream. The province has set a 75% waste reduction target for the beverage industry and we should hold them to meeting that target within a few years and then moving beyond it. RCM believes that economic incentives will likely need to be part of the system to achieve higher recovery rates.
3. Part 2. of the EPC resolution as it stands appears to encourage the Province to "provide province-wide incentives for recovery of plastic and glass containers." We have two difficulties with this statement. First we believe it to be the responsibility of industry [i.e. Stewardship Manitoba and the Canadian Beverage Container Recycling Association (CBCRA)] to provide any necessary incentives (perhaps through a deposit-return system) as part of their extended producer responsibility (EPR), not the taxpayers of Manitoba. Second the resolution omits the most valuable container material – aluminum. It is environmentally and economically much more important to recover aluminum than glass, for example.
4. A further concern is whether expected gains in material recovery might be more than offset by additional greenhouse gases generated by a series of "voluntary depots" that encourage people to

hop in their cars with their empties to get monetary rebates (instead of placing the containers in their blue boxes at home). This result would be contrary to the city's and province's greenhouse gas reduction strategies. RCM much prefers a deposit-return system in which empties can be taken to the places where beverages are sold, as in BC, as this can be done with no increase in travel from ordinary shopping. In any case, a container recovery system should be a well-designed component of a comprehensive waste reduction plan in order to do more good than harm.

5. Finally, we are concerned that the recycling depot resolution, unlike the City-wide Waste Reduction Plan resolution, does not contain a reference to the Public Service for professional analysis to evaluate the alternative ways to get to 75% and beyond. Such an examination, we believe, is crucial to getting the best design to serve sustainable objectives.

Hence we propose the following recommendation:

Council should amend the title of the resolution to “Container Recycling Initiatives” and amend part 2. as follows:

That the City-wide Waste Reduction Plan process, supported by research, shall involve the Province of Manitoba, the Canadian Beverage Container Recycling Association (CBCRA) and other stakeholders to explore:

- (i) all effective means to achieve a 75% recovery rate for beverage containers within three years without a net increase in greenhouse gases,**
- (ii) the possible roles of economic incentives and depots to achieve increased returns in the most environmentally friendly ways, and**
- (iii) ways to reduce and reuse beverage containers, including an increase in local bottling of refillable containers.**