



Media Release

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Contact:

Brock Macdonald
Director of Communications
Phone: 604 683-6009 ext. 305
Cell: 604 551-4454
E-mail: brock@rcbc.bc.ca

EPR and Waste Reduction in BC

British Columbia is today a leader in waste reduction and extended producer responsibility (EPR) programs due in part to initiatives developed to combat litter more than 30 years ago. With the 1970 *Litter Act*, B.C. became the first jurisdiction in North America to establish a mandatory deposit-refund system for soft drink and beer containers. Once the success of this litter-control approach was recognized many jurisdictions followed B.C.'s lead, enacting similar legislation.

Since that time, B.C. has established environmental stewardship programs for paint, flammable liquids, pesticides, tires, lead-acid batteries, medications, used lubricating oil, as well as a now expanded program for beverage containers. These programs, all industry managed except tires and batteries, divert materials from the solid waste stream and either recycle them into new products or ensure they are disposed of in an environmentally responsible manner.

Not only do these programs keep litter off the streets, they also protect our environment from potentially hazardous materials, such as lead, mercury and PCBD-type fire retardants, used in the manufacture of consumer products.

In 2004, B.C.'s EPR programs were set as product schedules under the omnibus Recycling Regulation. The next product class expected to be added to the Recycling Regulation is electronic waste or e-waste. E-waste includes computer components, televisions, cell phones and other consumer electronics, that contain potentially hazardous heavy metals and chemicals. An average computer monitor contains 5 lbs of lead, a substance long since banned from consumer paints and other products due to the health hazard it presents.

Other products that could be considered for future EPR programs include disposable batteries and non-recyclable plastic grocery bags.

B.C.'s EPR system gives our province an edge in environmental stewardship, but it only works if the products are diverted to the appropriate program. Recent solid waste audits have indicated that products covered by EPR regulations, as well as easily recyclable materials such as paper, glass and metal, are being tossed in household garbage and creeping back into our landfills.

Not only does this carelessness prove harmful to the environment, it also wastes the limited landfill space available.

Currently the enforcement of in-place bans and restrictions on waste is almost nonexistent. Serious attention to these matters can have a real impact on waste diversion by acting as an educational tool and incentive to comply with the regulation or bylaw in question. The Recycling Council of British Columbia (RCBC) is a strong supporter of the enforcement approach.

One method for extending the lifespan of landfills now being tried by a number of regional districts on Vancouver Island and the Kootenays, is to ban or remove compostable organics from the municipal solid waste stream. These organics comprise as much as 45 percent of the garbage sent to landfills. Banning organics and diverting them to a more appropriate management system, such as commercial composting, can cut the municipal solid waste almost in half, thus doubling the usable lifespan of landfills.

While these programs are becoming increasingly necessary to provide environmental protection, preventing waste is more cost effective approach. The easiest method to prevent waste is to remember the three Rs: reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Consumers can save money and reduce potential harm to the environment by eliminating unnecessary purchases or by consuming goods that are more environmentally friendly, such as bulk items that have less packaging.

Consumers can also promote the reuse of items, such as leftover paint, by giving it to a friend or neighbour. Other reusable items can be sold in a garage sale, donated to charity, or placed in a free ad on the RCBC's vancouver.reuses.com web site. The web site is free to list items or events such as yard and garage sales.

If someone is not sure how to recycle, needs to know what items can be recycled, or has a general recycling or waste reduction question, they can call the BC Recycling Hotline Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm at 604 R-E-C-Y-C-L-E (732-9253) in the Greater Vancouver Area or 1 800 667-4321 throughout B.C. RCBC Hotline operators have the most complete database in the province listing all the information on recycling and waste reduction in your area.

Sidebar:

Following are some tips on waste prevention and recycling.

WASTE PREVENTION:

The minimal use or greater reuse of packaging: Packaging is a major source of waste in our consumer-based society. Manufacturers can reduce waste by designing for minimum packaging. While products need to be protected during shipping, materials such as boxes, pallets and packing materials designed for reuse can substantially reduce costs and waste.

Use durable equipment and supplies: Using quality, long-lasting equipment that can be serviced and reused rather than discarded minimizes waste. This practice supports quality manufacturers. Higher initial costs are often justified by lower replacement and disposal costs as equipment is in use for a longer period. Cost savings may also be realized by renting, leasing or sharing needed equipment with other organizations or individuals.

Utilize reusable products rather than single-use items: Simple measures such as washing and reusing ceramic mugs instead of using disposable cups, using cloth shopping bags rather than disposable plastic ones, or reusing items such as file folders and interoffice envelopes mean less waste and lower costs.

Using materials more efficiently: Policies to reduce waste and conserve materials can be as simple as switching to double-sided photocopying. This can cut paper costs by up to 40 percent.

Sell or donate used goods: Selling to or exchanging excess materials with other companies can reduce waste. Used furniture or other materials can be donated to charities. RCBC's Materials Exchange Program (MEX) and Vancouver.reuses.com free-ad web site can assist by facilitating the distribution of these items to other groups or companies - at no charge!

RECYCLING:

Paper: Most paper is recyclable. Office paper is usually collected in two grades: *high grade*, such as white copier or printer paper, and *mixed*, such as colored paper, file folders and envelopes. Newsprint is also recyclable but is typically processed through a separate stream in order to apply a method of de-inking.

Corrugated cardboard: Corrugated cardboard is a large portion of the recycling stream and can be easily separated from other materials. Because of its volume, collecting cardboard for recycling can significantly reduce the amount of solid waste requiring disposal in the landfill.

Glass: Most glass is recyclable although some separation by colour (clear, green, and brown) may be required. Glass needs to be clean and free of contaminants.

Metal: Aluminum, tin/steel cans and other scrap metals are readily recyclable. Metals, such as copper, can yield a high price depending on market conditions.

Plastic: Recovered plastics are separated by classification and identified by a numbering system ranging between one and seven. These numbers are usually displayed on the bottom of the container inside a triangle. Call the RCBC Recycling Hotline to determine which classifications of plastics are collected in your area.

Other Recyclables: Dozens of other materials, such as wood waste, textiles, electronics, batteries and drywall may also be recyclable in your area. To find a recycling centre that accepts a product or material you have, call the RCBC Recycling Hotline.