

A less trashy Nova Scotia - Recycling

Lindsey A. Greene - 2001

In Nova Scotia, taking out the trash may now be easier because there's less to take out--in fact, 50% less. The eastern province has become the first in Canada to reduce solid waste disposal by 50% over 1989 levels, a nationwide goal set that year by the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment.

The reduction is the result of a comprehensive solid waste management strategy developed by the Nova Scotia Department of the Environment following the 1995 passage of the Nova Scotia Environment Act. The act stipulated a number of regulations and bans that would form the basis of the strategy. Bob Kenney, a solid waste resource analyst for the department, says that to meet the 50% reduction goal, Nova Scotians were encouraged to compost, recycle, and choose products with less packaging whenever possible.

As part of the strategy, a highly successful deposit/refund system for beverage bottles was implemented. The return rate on beverage containers sold in Nova Scotia is nearly 80%, with 215 million containers returned annually. The average deposit refund is half of the amount the customer paid, and Kenney says the Resource Recovery Fund Board--a private, nonprofit company that manages several components of the strategy--made Can\$9 million with the program last year. Half that annual revenue goes directly back to municipalities in a yearly lump sum, and another quarter goes into waste education funding and equipment to reduce waste. The remainder goes to private waste diversion businesses.

The strategy also includes a recycling program for used tires (more than 2.3 million tires have been recycled since January 1997). And on 30 November 1998 Nova Scotia became the first province to ban compostable organic material from landfills. "We firmly believe that we could not reach 50% diversion [over 1989 levels] without the ban on compostable organic materials from disposal," says Kenney. By diverting waste, Nova Scotia has gone from hundreds of landfills in the 1970s to just 18 today. By 2005, Kenney expects there to be only 8-10 landfills, and each will be fully lined with a plastic collection system to collect and treat leachate.

The strategy has also helped boost employment. In this province of 940,000 people, there are 3,000 jobs in waste management and recycling, with 1,000 new jobs since the strategy began. New and innovative companies that utilize recyclables continue to spring up. For example, Novapet, based in Amherst, grinds up PET plastic (used in items such as soft drink bottles), then sells the material to Canadian and U.S. manufacturers to make carpet and clothing. Thermo-Cell, which has a facility in Debert, manufactures cellulose building insulation from old newspapers. Other businesses specialize in recycling items such as paint and used lumber.

Nova Scotia's program is attracting inquiries from Russia, China, Ireland, and other Canadian provinces. The Department of the Environment also hosts environmental science students from France and Britain who wish to work with and learn from the program. "I think a program similar to ours could be successful anywhere," says Kenney.

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