

Getting a grip on tough trash

Deposit returns for old paint cans and batteries, more highrise recycling, urged in city hall report

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CITY HALL BUREAU

It's the kind of stuff that creates a real headache when it's discarded. Old batteries, light bulbs, electronics, furniture, mattresses, residential construction and demolition waste. A report released last week by city hall staff has set out ambitious plans for dealing with recyclable material and organic waste.

Among the highlights is the introduction of the Green Bin program to Toronto apartments, condos, townhouses and co-ops, and a new volume-based user pay system for non-organic garbage collection, both of which are to begin next year.

But the report, released last week as part of the campaign to help the city reach 70 per cent solid-waste diversion by 2010 (from 42 per cent last year), notably sets out approaches to deal with harder-to-handle garbage.

For instance, it wants the city's solid waste managers to report back by October on whether items like batteries, light bulbs and paint cans are suitable for a deposit-return or "take-it-back" program.

"You never see beer bottles in the garbage. Why? Because you can get a deposit back. I want to see the same thing for those old paint cans your dad stores in the garage – and old batteries," works committee chair Glenn De Baeremaeker said last week. He said countless numbers of batteries are currently going to landfill, and the toxins they'll emit is a deep concern for him.

The report also calls for the development of "reuse" centres to fix and reassemble discarded electronic products and other durable goods like mattresses. It suggests the city could be a partner in such enterprises or provide enabling grants for their creation.

The city should also look into recycling residential construction and demolition waste, the report says.

De Baeremaeker believes all of these measures, coupled with new initiatives for easier to handle waste, will one day lead to a time "when we won't need a garbage can."

Right now, the councillor said he's thrilled that extending the Green Bin program to multi-unit residential buildings is among proposals being sent for council approval.

"Right now, there are 30,000 townhouse units with no Green Bin pickup," he said. "That's a lot of people. Under this new proposal, those townhouse units would get the Cadillac service that single-family homeowners get."

The Green Bin was an instant success when introduced to single-family homes, and De Baeremaeker expects the same at the multi-residential sites, which encompass 526,000 households.

The report also wants the Blue Box program for glass and paper recyclables to phase in large, wheeled Blue Carts, and to make these more available to dwellers in highrises and townhouses.

De Baeremaeker said he was pleased to see the staff report also calls for recycling of plastic bags once the Blue Carts are in place. The proposal is to separate the bags and send them to a company that will melt the plastic into a liquid form. The liquid will later be turned into dried pellets, providing raw material for new plastic bags.