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Let's talk trash

By DON PEAT, SUN MEDIA

Trash talking in this city has been the art of aiming high -- then missing by a long shot.

It's been an almost decade long climb for Toronto to get to a diversion rate of 42% of household waste.

But that number includes blue box recyclables and green bin organics and averages out high recycling rates from single family homes and extremely low rates from apartments and condos.

Regardless, 42% is a long way from the political promises from Toronto's past.

In 2001, when the city only diverted 27% of its waste, then-mayor Mel Lastman unveiled a new three-stream system to divert 60% of Toronto's solid waste by 2006.

Lastman vowed the city would divert 100% of its waste by 2010.

We didn't meet the 2006 goal and we won't meet the 2010 target.

42% DIVERSION

The number has hovered around 42% for the last two years. In November 2007 city council set its sights on reaching 70% diversion by 2010.

According to city documents staff predict they can divert 48% of waste from landfills this year, 56% by 2009 and 70% by 2010.

"There's nothing wrong with having high targets," said Public Works chairman Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker.

He thinks the city has come a long way in the 20 years since it started recycling and he's confident the city will hit its 70% diversion goal or come close. He hopes the new pay-to-throw garbage bins will increase recycling participation. "We're going to do much better," he said.

Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong disagrees saying the new roll out bins aren't going to optimize the diversion of waste. "It's a reckless use of taxpayers' dollars," he said.

Toronto residents are already good recyclers compared to other cities, Minnan-Wong said, touting the single-home diversion rate of 58%.

The city predicts once the bins are implemented that rate will only increase to 61%, he said.

"We're spending over \$50 million for three lousy points," Minnan-Wong warned.