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Recycling makes cents It's finally cheaper than sending Toronto's trash to the dump

By DON PEAT, SUN MEDIA

For the first time ever in Toronto recycling is cheaper than sending trash to the dump -- by about \$28 a tonne.

That's welcome news, \$5.6 million worth, based on the roughly 200,000 tonnes of blue box junk collected annually in this city.

And good news considering recycling is predicted to climb as Torontonians are about to pay by the bucket for the trash they throw away.

In case you don't buy the numbers and think recycling is a scam, don't say it too close to Geoff Rathbone.

"That's absolutely not true," said the general manager of the city's solid waste management services.

"Why would we throw material away that we get paid on average \$100 a tonne and in turn would have to pay approximately \$65 a tonne to send it to a landfill."

BLUE BINS

Although he admits the early days of recycling were rough going to find markets for the goods they were taking in, the blue bins are actually paying off now.

"For the first time recycling is now less expensive than going to landfill," he told the Sun this week.

It is still cheaper to load and haul garbage rather than to load, haul, sort and ship recycling. But if you take the whole process including the payoff of the recyclable goods into account - blue bins are cheaper for the city than just sending everything to the dump.

Forget the fluffy arguments about saving the earth and avoiding filling up landfills, this makes cents.

It costs the city on average \$236 a tonne to recycle, according to 2006 numbers. But those metal cans, plastic bottles and newspaper bring in on average around \$109 a tonne when sold to recyclers, reducing the city's cost to recycle down to \$127 a tonne.

Meanwhile, garbage costs the city around \$155 a tonne.

Public Works chairman Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker said recycling costs drop to less than \$100 a tonne when you factor in the \$8 million to \$10 million the city gets from industries that produce recyclable materials.

'IT IS CHEAPER'

"Whichever way you look at recycling it is cheaper than throwing stuff in the garbage," he said.

University of Toronto economics professor Donald Dewees said recycling only makes sense when it makes economic sense. For him the obvious case for recycling is aluminum cans, which are relatively easy to separate and have a high value. "We should only recycle if there are willing buyers and the cost to the city is less than the cost to landfill," Dewees said.

Councillor Denzil Minnan-Wong said the increase isn't surprising because, like any commodity, recyclables have ups and downs and recent prices are on an up swing.

De Baeremaeker remembers when he lobbied Metro Toronto council to start a recycling program 20 years ago it cost municipalities double to recycle something rather than throw it in a landfill.

"When we started recycling we had very significant market challenges," Rathbone said.

There wasn't an abundance of companies willing to take recycled materials because recycling was relatively new.