

Selkirk a solid waste winner

The City of Selkirk's *Solid Waste Management Plan* increased diversion rates by 44% and helped lengthen the life of its landfill. The landfill was due to close in 2002, so the city adopted a plan that addressed business, commercial, institutional and residential waste issues. A combination of municipal purchasing policies, material ban bylaws, a new transfer station, fee-based garbage collection and bag limits has diverted residential waste by 38% and self-haul waste by 51%. The city also initiated a three-phase centralized composting program, beginning with a subsidized residential back yard composting program. Its goal is to divert 50% of waste by 2006 and 85 per cent by 2011.

Background

The City of Selkirk has approximately 3,500 residential garbage collection points (single and multiple family dwellings) and 300 businesses. Before adopting its *Solid Waste Management Plan*, the city was throwing 8,000 tonnes of waste into its landfill.

In 1989, the city's waste collection contract with BFI Canada was due for renewal. Councillor **Bunny Cooper** wanted to begin a waste diversion program and urged Council to request that BFI, as part of its contract, begin collecting recyclable material. Council endorsed the idea and, in 1990, BFI began a Blue Bag Recycling program in partnership with ARC Industries, a training centre for mentally challenged adults.

In 1997, the city completed a feasibility study to expand its landfill. As the landfill was due for closure, the city purchased a 70-ha. plot of land adjacent to the existing site for its expansion. Unfortunately, because the site was in another municipality, a conditional use permit was refused and the landfill was closed in November 2002.

Although the origins of Selkirk's *Solid Waste Management Plan* date back to 1990, it wasn't until the landfill closure date drew closer that the city hired a

consultant to review existing waste reduction programs in Manitoba and elsewhere. The intent was to use that information to create a waste management plan for Selkirk that could also be used as a model by other Manitoba communities.

A preliminary assessment found that much of Selkirk's waste could be recycled or composted. At the time, residential and commercial waste was collected weekly on a rotating five-day cycle and the city was diverting about 10% of its waste through the Blue Bag program. The city also separated selected waste streams at its landfill (tires and certain appliances).

The city set up a task force to develop the plan. The plan took about a year to complete and its major objectives were to increase waste diversion 30% by 2003, 50% by 2006, and 85% by 2011.

Project details

"Initially, the consultant recommended building a larger transfer station," recalled **Randy Borsa**, the city's director of operations. Borsa toured a variety of transfer stations with the consultant and found that most communities that were similar in size to Selkirk and within 25 miles of a major landfill had their waste directly hauled to landfill.

The city chose this route, using BFI as its waste contractor. BFI, in turn, uses Metro Recycling of Winnipeg as the recycling contractor. Selkirk also downsized its current transfer station. The station is now used to

store recyclables before they are sent to Metro Recycling, house the residential composting program, and as a drop-off for leaf and yard waste, tires, waste oil, scrap metal, and hazardous materials. The city also operates a freon removal service from the station.

To augment the consultant's findings, Selkirk also studied waste trade magazines and websites world wide. "We wanted to assess current trends, goals and accomplishments in waste minimization," Borsa explained. "Most had blue bag or blue box programs and composting, and stressed the importance of an education program."

Selkirk wanted to promote activities that would avoid the generation of waste and be convenient for residents. Reducing waste had economic, as well as environmental benefits, as landfill tipping fees would be reduced as waste production decreased.

The city moved from blue bags to blue boxes and changed recycling pick-up from bi-weekly to weekly. Recyclable materials include paper, cardboard, cans, glass, and certain plastics. Each residence was provided with a blue box and apartment complexes were given one large recycling bin for every 10 units.

In conjunction with the blue box program, the city imposed a two-bag/can limit on residential garbage to encourage people to reduce waste at the source. Residents purchase \$1 tags for any bag/can over the limit. Many residents were initially unhappy with this part of the program. "No one likes change,

but once we explained it they realized it was needed," said Borsa.

Selkirk provided a 50% subsidy to residents to purchase a \$50 backyard composter. "With the cities of Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie, we put in a joint effort and purchase the composters," said Borsa. "We now have a waiting list of people who want them." People who choose not to, or are unable to, compost at home can have the material picked up at curbside in the summer months. Leaf and yard waste in clear bags is picked up, but also can



still be dropped off at the transfer station. The material is composted on site and used in city landscaping.

To launch the new initiatives, the city developed public awareness campaigns to educate the public on the changes to its waste collection. The city sent newsletters explaining the changes and offering tips on waste reduction, composting, and recycling; gave local radio and regional television media public service announcements; provided articles and advertisements on waste management to the local newspaper; and set up a 'Hot Line' to promote the new programs and a composting 'Help Line.'

Selkirk eliminated commercial waste pick-up except for small businesses that must purchase the \$1 garbage tags for all of their waste. In exchange for the eliminated pick up, the city reduced the business tax by 25%, roughly equal to the amount businesses were being charged for garbage pick up. Businesses are responsible for disposing of their waste through independent haulers, but the city continues to pick up their recyclables.

The project was financed by the city, with an additional \$25,000 grant from Manitoba Conservation's Waste Reduction and Pollution Prevention (WRAPP) Fund. Revenues from the sale of recyclable materials offset the city's operating budget, which is expected to decrease to about \$618,000 in 2004 from a peak of \$797,000 in 2003.

In Manitoba, the Manitoba Product Stewardship Corporation (MPSC) provides revenues to municipalities through the sale of recyclable materials. Municipalities file certificates showing the number of tonnes of materials recycled. The 2003 rate per tonne paid by MPSC to municipalities was \$152, netting the city close to \$100,000 in revenue. The rate decreased to \$145 per tonne as of April 1, 2004.

The *Solid Waste Management Plan* was launched on June 1, 2003. Between June and November 2003, the city landfilled just over 1,000 tonnes of waste, an almost 40% reduction and 10% higher than the original goal.

Results

- 387.8 tonnes of MPSC approved products have been recycled.
- Recycling of other materials has increased (e.g., 20 tonnes of metal, 3,037 tires, 4,080 litres of waste oil, and 805 litres of used fuel). Up until November 2002, these materials went to landfill.
- Implementing the bag/can limit and having residents purchase \$1 tags for extra waste has promoted recycling and reusing.
- Business taxes were reduced in exchange

for eliminating commercial waste pick up. "In some cases, the business tax was as high as \$10,000 a year. That's a substantial decrease," said Borsa.

- The city began a purchasing policy favouring products made with recycled, recyclable or reusable content. It also developed a by-law to ban certain materials from landfill.
- The city has reduced the number of employee hours at the transfer station. This reduction has already saved the city \$30,000.

Lessons learned

- **Learn from others.** Selkirk's consultant and staff reviewed similar programs in several municipalities and toured several facilities. Learning from others helped the city plan its own needs and avoid common pitfalls.
- **Hire an independent consultant.** Borsa explained that the consultant's experience and knowledge of other programs helped decrease the amount of staff time that would have been required to research programs and opportunities.
- **Change takes time.** Many residents were unhappy with the bag/can limit, and some had their blue boxes stolen. Borsa reported, however, that perceptions have begun to shift and that as residents get used to the program, many of these problems will be resolved. Also, moving from five-day solid waste and one bi-weekly recycling collection to a three-day solid waste and two-day recycling collection was a big challenge. "It has created some problems," said Borsa. "But you have to be patient and work with the community and your contractors to sort out problems."

Related and future initiatives

As the *Solid Waste Management Plan* was being developed, the city was working on a full engineering study of all its municipal facilities. With a grant from the Green Municipal Funds, the city identified ways it could reduce energy use, greenhouse gas emissions, and improve its infrastructure. The study evaluated lighting upgrades, automated heating system controls, water conservation devices, solar heating technologies and mechanical system measures.

The findings were presented to Council in November 2001, and after a revised financing proposal was developed, Council approved the recommendations in the spring of 2003. "The consultant proposed taking the costs to do the first phase from the utility reserve and paying the reserve back through energy savings," said Borsa. Selkirk has now implemented some of the recommendations including the installation of a geothermal heat pump and a solarwall. ●

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