

Manitoba's "community-based" recycling success



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Here's some trivia for you: When did the first recycling program start in a Manitoba community? If you answered "long before any European settler arrived," you're probably correct, but the first organized and heavily promoted recycling program in Manitoba actually started sometime around WWII when all Canadians were encouraged to "scrap" their steel and other materials to support the war effort. (Tell that to your kids and grandchildren the next time they lecture you about reducing waste!)

Unfortunately, as the war years and the Great Depression faded into history, our society gradually lost its conservation ethic and we started to take our resources for granted. To a large degree, this continues today, but thankfully there are signs of a turnaround in our thinking and one day we may look back to the year 1995 as a key point in this turnaround.

At that time, after years of negotiation with municipalities and various other stakeholders, the Province of Manitoba introduced a regulation that created the Manitoba Product Stewardship Program and an independent, multi-stakeholder board, now called Manitoba Product Stewardship Corporation, to administer the system.

The original objective of the MPSP program was simple – it was designed to promote the expansion of Manitoba's recycling services for packaging and printed materials. It wasn't intended to influence aluminum mining practices in Bolivia, nor was it intended to reduce organic waste, hazardous wastes or any other wastes municipalities contend with. It was created with a very specific job in mind and it was provided a very specific revenue base consistent with that job description.

The MPSP framework was introduced as "an interim step" towards increased product stewardship and it certainly did



"The success of recycling in Manitoba has always and will always fall on the efforts of the residents, volunteers and leaders of our communities."

(and still does) have its critics. As discussions continue on how best to move past the "interim" approach, there is one element of the system that should not be overlooked in the quest to move towards a "greener" future, and that one element is the community-based approach that continues to deliver real and measurable results.

Before the MPSP framework was introduced there were recycling programs already in operation in all four corners of Manitoba including

Virden (west), Winkler (south), Steinbach (east), and even Churchill (north). Many of these early recycling efforts were funded through shaky and unpredictable markets for scrap materials and temporary, ad-hoc funding from various grants. Yet it was reported that these small local efforts were able to recycle approximately 5,000 tonnes of packaging and printed material per year. It may not seem like much today, but given the challenges these early programs faced, it's a testament to the will and efforts

