

# Communities going green:

## 10 ways to make it real

Randall McQuaker, Resource Conservation Manitoba

**Amid media hype** and high public expectations, local governments are moving forward with environmental action plans. **Randall McQuaker** from the non-profit group Resource Conservation Manitoba (RCM) takes a look at who's doing what in Manitoba and across Canada.

Two striking conclusions emerge from even a quick survey of local environmental initiatives in Manitoba and other provinces. First, the range of what is being done is truly impressive. Communities are taking on critical challenges around waste, pollution, climate change, energy efficiency and more. And they are doing so using a variety of tools and approaches aimed at reducing the ecological footprint of local services and operations.

Second, practical steps are being taken in communities of varying sizes, not just larger cities. Clearly, people in all parts of the country increasingly expect municipal governments to take their environmental responsibilities seriously. Decision-makers know they must respond.

Following is a snapshot of community environmental initiatives in Manitoba and elsewhere.

### (1) **Idle-free**

Over 100 communities across Canada have implemented campaigns to reduce vehicle idling. In Manitoba, Stonewall and Morden-Winkler are among the leaders. Brandon's Environmental Steering Committee has promoted a move to have idle-free signs posted at all schools in the city by next fall.

### (2) **Green buildings**

Making efficient use of energy and resources is a key idea behind building green. The Province of Manitoba is currently reviewing options for standards that would apply to provincially-funded facilities. The planned PCU Centre in Portage la Prairie is aiming for LEED Silver. Elsewhere, Calgary



Winkler celebrates World Record Walk with 1,436 participants. Manitoba had the largest participation among provinces with 165 official walking events.

has a sustainable building policy committing to achieving LEED Gold standards in construction of new facilities and Silver for major renovations.

### (3) **Landfill bans**

It has been 10 years since Nova Scotia moved to ban organics and recyclables from landfill. That's one of the factors in that province's nation-leading waste diversion rates. Selective restrictions are finding their way into practice in smaller centres in Manitoba. For example, the SWAMP regional transfer station (serving Stanley, Winkler and Morden) won't accept clean cardboard. That sends a strong recycling signal.

### (4) **Plastic bags**

Leaf Rapids, Huntingdon (Quebec) and San Francisco are among the communities, large and small, that have taken steps to restrict the distribution of plastic grocery bags. In the big picture, plastic bags are not the most formidable barrier to a sustainable future. But their use in everyday life means they have symbolic value as well as practical impact. RCM favours an eco-fee with proceeds invested in community waste reduction education.

### (5) **Composting**

Organics comprise about one-third of the residential waste stream. When sent to landfill, they produce methane in the

process of breaking down. Residential curbside pickup is available in Morden from beginning of May until the end of September for a fee. Ladysmith, BC also offers the service to residents. In Thunder Bay, collection of leaf and garden waste is free during a 10-day period in spring.

### (6) Biking

It's easy, fast, healthy and non-polluting. Larger cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal are putting resources into commuter cycling. And so are smaller centres like Ajax and Pickering in Ontario. The City of Winnipeg was a major supporter of the first-ever Bike to Work Day in Manitoba in June 2008. Cyclists point to the need for on-road infrastructure, so that cycling can be for transportation as well as a recreation.

### (7) Waste fees

With recent figures from Statistics Canada showing Manitoba lagging in waste diversion, incentives like waste fees are getting a second look. It's an approach that has worked well in Selkirk and Portage la Prairie. Airdrie in Alberta and Owen Sound, ON, are among the hundred communities in Canada that have adopted various forms of "user pay" for waste.

### (8) Pesticides

Growing concerns over the impact of exposure to synthetic chemical pesticides on human health, especially children's health, have prompted some communities to ban or limit the use of these substances. In Quebec, the restrictions are province-wide. In Manitoba, the cities of Brandon and Winnipeg have started to reflect public concern through bylaws. Morden has committed to use less toxic products for weed control in areas frequented by the public.

### (9) Procurement

Local governments in Manitoba direct the spending of millions of dollars every year. For communities, green procurement means purchasing eco-friendly products that help reduce the environmental footprint of municipal operations. Bathurst, NB, and Waterloo, ON, have municipal policies. Manitoba's provincial government does, as well.

### (10) Active transportation

Walkable communities are great for health, for business, and for the environment. Towns and cities need planning standards that make it safe, easy, attractive and convenient for people to walk and cycle. The City of Winnipeg commissioned a study of active transportation (AT) and has followed up by hiring an AT Co-ordinator and appointing an advisory committee.

There's much more to report – on energy retrofits, rain barrels, community gardens,

farmers markets, carpooling ... the list goes on. One inescapable take-away message – for municipalities across the country, sustainability is here to stay. **L**

*Resource Conservation Manitoba is a non-profit group that promotes composting, waste reduction, sustainable transportation and resource conservation. For more information, visit [www.resourceconservation.mb.ca](http://www.resourceconservation.mb.ca) or e-mail [rcm@resourceconservation.mb.ca](mailto:rcm@resourceconservation.mb.ca).*



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