

Organics Diversion Strategy

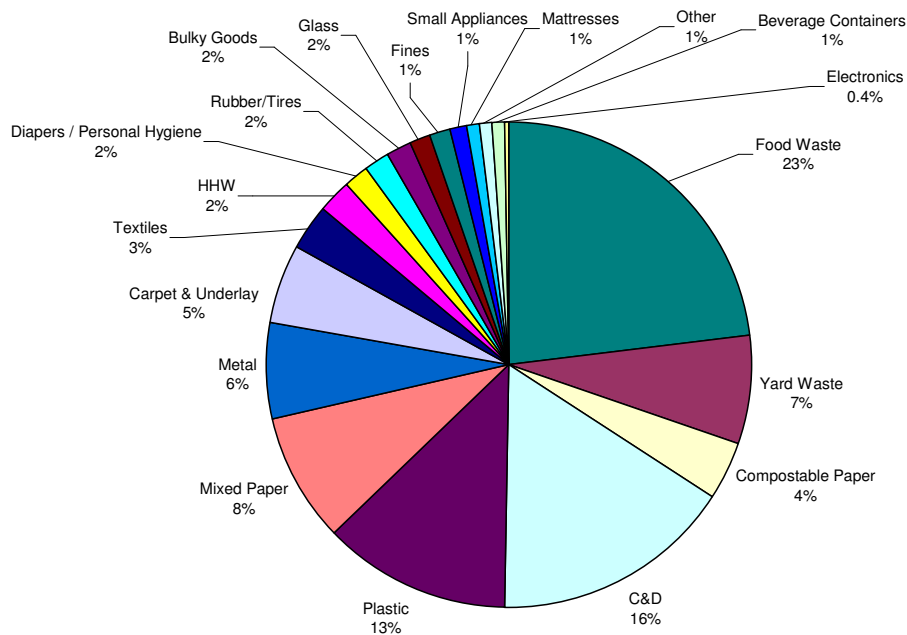
Why Divert Organics?

It's in the Plan

When we reduce the amount of waste that goes into the landfill or other disposal sites, we save resources, reduce costs and minimize our footprint on the environment. That's why the RDN adopted the Zero Waste diversion target in 2002 as its long-term goal. Zero Waste builds on the significant successes of the earlier 3Rs Plan (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), under which, by 2003, we were diverting 57 percent of our solid waste from the landfill. That was more than the 50 percent target set in 1989 by the provincial environment ministry for all regional districts, but it's still too much. The updated Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) approved by the RDN Board in 2004 aims to increase this diversion rate to 75 percent by 2010 by diverting organic materials away from landfill.

Organics Are the Largest Component of Solid Waste

A waste composition study done in the fall of 2004 found that 35 percent total waste sent to landfill is compostable organic material.



This is by far the biggest single component of the waste stream. Broken down by sector, compostable organics make up well over 50 percent of the residential waste stream and 40 percent of the industrial, commercial, institutional (ICI) waste stream. Consequently, diverting compostable organics is the next logical step in waste diversion programs.

Organics Diversion Leads The Way to Zero Waste

Zero Waste is the long-term goal of the SWMP, but the SWMP does not contain a description on how the RDN will achieve Zero Waste. The main reason for this is that we must successfully divert organics before spending significant effort on the final 25 percent of waste that will be left after organics diversion is fully implemented. After organics diversion is a success we will review the remainder of the waste to determine the most promising next steps.

Economic and Infrastructure Development

Composting is an industry that creates a beneficial product. Composting also creates jobs and other economic activity. There are currently two composting operations in the RDN, however, there can be no composting industry if the raw materials required, compostable organics, are sent to the landfill. If we want a strong industry, we must make every effort to divert the feedstock that the industry needs from the landfill to the composting plants.

What Do We Mean By Organics?

In general, compostable organics consist of food waste, compostable paper products such as paper towels and tissues and yard waste. In the RDN over 70 percent of yard waste received at solid waste facilities is already diverted from landfill to local composting plants and yard waste comprises only seven percent of material landfilled. As a result food waste and compostable paper products make up the largest quantity of organic material that is still sent to landfill.

Food Waste

The majority of the organic material going to the landfill is food waste. Food waste includes pre-consumer organic waste from food sales and processing operations such as produce departments of grocery stores, wholesale produce suppliers and kitchen waste from restaurants and institutional facilities (school and hospital cafeterias and food service departments). Food waste also includes post-consumer waste from restaurant bussing stations and institutional facilities. Food waste from the residential sector would also be considered post-consumer food waste.

Soiled paper

There is less volume of waste soiled paper compared to food waste, however soiled paper can be composted and is relatively easy to segregate from the waste stream. Commercial restrooms represent a clean stream of damp paper towels that cannot be recycled as paper fibre, and cumulatively, across the district make up significant amounts of waste.

Other Materials

There are other materials that could be composted such as plastic made from corn or other organic polymers.

Yard Waste

Yard waste is the organic waste that comes from our yards. This includes grass clippings, prunings, vegetable garden waste, brush and branches. Things like dimensional lumber or fencing material are not considered yard waste in the context of the Organics Diversion Strategy.

Who Would Divert Organics?

Like all waste, organic material comes from two broad categories of generators, people in their homes and people in their businesses.

Commercial and Institutional

- Restaurants
- Retail Food Stores
- Wholesale Fresh Food Suppliers
- Hotels
- Schools
- Health Care Facilities including Hospitals

Residential

- Single Family Dwellings
- Multi Family Complexes

How Will We Divert Organics?

Food Waste

The RDN, its businesses and residents have achieved great results in diverting material from disposal, proving that the mechanics of diversion are applicable across a wide range of people, places and materials. The core mechanisms to divert organics are no different from what is already in place for other materials. Organics diversion presents no unsolved technical problems to consider.

Yard Waste

One private waste hauler offers yard waste collection services and another private hauler has plans to introduce a new yard waste service. The RDN solid waste and water departments are working to promote low-water, low-waste landscaping. The Regional Landfill, the composting plant at Duke Point and the Church Road transfer Station all offer drop-off service for residential yard waste. The RDN, through partnership with community gardens, provides backyard composting demonstrations and education.

The numerous options available for yard waste diversion and the effectiveness of these programs in diverting yard waste from disposal indicates that the current yard waste diversion programs should continue.

What is the Priority? First Steps

Commercial Food Waste Diversion

Commercial generators of compostable organic material can achieve early and significant diversion success. In most operations, organic and food waste is mostly separated from other waste already. Examples of this are kitchen waste receptacles in restaurants, waste bins in grocery store produce departments and bags of damp paper towels from commercial restrooms. Little additional effort is required to divert this material to a composting plant.

Some individual businesses generate a lot of organic waste. There is a relatively small number of commercial operations (300-400) that generate organic waste. Fewer sites to work with and larger amounts of organic waste from each site improve the likelihood of success.

Commercial operators are motivated by cost savings. Over time, the cost to compost organic waste should be appreciably lower than the cost to landfill organic waste.

There are already businesses in the RDN that are diverting organics. These early adopters provide case studies that provide valuable information to the rest of the business community in their transition to organics diversion.

Future Steps

Residential Sector

RDN staff is currently studying, and will report on residential organics diversion programs. Other jurisdictions such as the City of Toronto and the Province of Nova Scotia have implemented residential organics diversion programs and the results of these, and other programs will be assessed.

There are a number of different forms that a residential collection program could take. Over the next year, RDN staff, based on the findings of the current study and the results of other programs will decide if a pilot project is needed and where, when and how a pilot project would be carried out.

If a pilot project is undertaken, the results of the project will be analyzed and the findings will help shape the next garbage and recycling contract tender, to be completed in 2006.

Timeline

The implementation of the Organics Diversion Strategy will begin in 2005 and all elements of the strategy will be in place in 2007.

2005

Commercial Food Waste Ban - Activities

- Amend RDN bylaw that governs solid waste management facilities to ban commercial organics.
- Implement communications plan and begin education and promotion of the commercial food waste ban allowing time for businesses to make the transition to organics diversion.
- Present results of residential organics diversion study, with recommendations to Committee of the Whole and Board.
- Implement commercial food waste ban financial penalties.

2006

Based on direction from the RDN Board on residential organics diversion, in 2006 we will either carry out an organics diversion pilot, pending budget approval, or include organics diversion in the garbage and recycling collection tender for the 2007 collection contract.