

first reading

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Garbage has never been very popular stuff. We pile it up in our homes, offices and businesses and, when necessary, carry it gingerly out to the back alley for someone else to take away.

We have long paid little attention to what happens to our garbage after it is hauled away. We do know, however, from the loud protests of our fellow citizens, that where it goes is preferably far from sight or smell of our homes.

The image of garbage is beginning to change, and this change is coming about as much out of necessity as out of logic. Landfill sites fill up and it is getting both more difficult and expensive to locate new ones. Resources are being squandered, both through indiscriminate waste and the throwing away of everything that has been used.

We are beginning to see that our garbage is a vast, virtually untapped, resource. We are finding out that we can use things again - recycle them - and save virgin resources while reducing the strain on our disposal sites.

This edition of *First Reading* is all about recycling.



Recycling

Alberta Environment

RECYCLING: THE SECOND TIME AROUND

John Lilley

Edmonton's decision to implement city-wide curbside collection of recyclables was almost buried under the controversy surrounding the location of the city's next landfill site. If it had not been for lively debate over splitting the recycling contract between two organizations, few Edmontonians would have been aware that their city was to have curbside recycling. With this in place, Edmonton becomes the first Alberta city to provide such a service.

Recycling has been tried before in Edmonton. In the early 1970s, newspaper was collected in a special weekly pick-up. That service disappeared when the price of used newsprint crashed. But the recycling ethic, borne of necessity in the not-so-wealthy past and carried forward to the present by an ingrained dislike of waste and a concern about the environment, is manifesting itself in practical recycling initiatives. This time recycling is more than an altruistic movement responding to environmental concerns. Now it is driven by the political and economic realities of waste management costs and landfill site selection.

Recycling's Potential

For years, industries have recognized the potential of recycling to reduce raw material needs and waste disposal costs. Alberta's steel industry, which annually produces products valued at \$200 million, depends entirely on 500 000 tonnes of scrap per year. An entire industry, based on scrap collection and processing, has grown up to service the steel mills and other metal processors. The Domglas glass plant in Redcliff, Alberta processes returned non-refillable liquor, wine and soft drink bottles to make new bottles that are used across the Prairies. Another Alberta company manufactures glass beads from cullet (scrap glass). Cullet purchases total more than \$1.6 million per year. Alberta's oil re-refining industry dates back 30 years, and about 20 percent of the lubricating oil sold annually is recovered and re-refined. Recycled post-consumer plastics products include

plant pots, food trays and woven fabrics made from used plastic soft drink containers. Recycled paper is raw material for local building product manufacturers and feedstock for mills in British Columbia and the Northwestern United States.

These are the more visible examples. Less visible is the in-house recycling - for example, scrap plastics are routinely reintroduced into the melting and forming machines - and the sale of scrap materials to other companies or brokers. As an example, shredded documents may end up in shingles, as backing for drywall or in packing materials. But for the individual, few convenient opportunities exist to recycle household wastes, and recycling of post-consumer materials depends on the dedicated effort of volunteers and non-profit organizations.

Public Hearings

The investigation into recycling began when the provincial government asked the Environment Council of Alberta to recommend ways of increasing recycling and appointed a Council Panel to look into the matter. The full potential of recycling had not been achieved and the government wanted to know how it could be. In 1986, the Environment Council conducted public hearings on the Recycling of Waste in Alberta. Hearings were held in at 11 locations across the province, and 134 briefs were received. The Panel also met with government and non-government agencies and visited recycling projects and industries.

In its report, the Environment Council argued that if recycling and waste disposal competed on a level playing field, Alberta's recycling industry would thrive and grow. That is the thrust of the 68 recommendations contained in the Environment Council of Alberta's *Report and Recommendations on Recycling*, released in May 1987.

A basic change in approach to recycling begins with recognition of the full costs of landfilling. Wherever the Panel went, it found that municipalities were having a hard time finding

new landfill sites. Despite this, few municipalities were seriously considering ways of reducing waste to conserve landfill space. Nor do many municipalities determine the costs in a way that recognizes the worth of their present landfill space, the increasing costs for replacement space, or the social and environmental costs of landfilling. As a result, municipal personnel often have an incomplete assessment of waste management costs and lack the data necessary to evaluate alternatives.

Most municipalities now pay for waste collection and disposal out of tax revenues, supplemented by tipping fees. As long as the waste generator is shielded from waste management costs by subsidies from general revenues, whether property taxes or provincial grants, there is no incentive to reduce waste and increase recycling. The principle of "user pay" should apply to waste management, and the costs should be evident to all users. This would be achieved if waste management systems were operated on a cost-recovery basis as self-supporting utilities. Complete recovery of costs requires full assessment not only of normal capital and operating costs, but also of environmental and social costs, lost opportunity costs, liability, landfill replacement, reclamation, monitoring and leachate control.

If all appropriate costs are included in waste management charges, then recycling becomes a more feasible alternative. Although recycling may have higher initial costs, it conserves resources and offers the economic benefits of job creation and production of useful goods. Landfilling has none of these benefits. The difficulty is to get waste managers to take a critical look at landfilling, and to consider the problems that will result from just continuing tomorrow what we do today. Education and a change in attitude are needed.

The Four Rs

The Council Panel recommended that the Alberta Government adopt, as its principle policy in waste management, the "Four Rs" — "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recover."

1. *Reduce* the production of waste.
2. *Reuse* products instead of discarding them.
3. *Recycle* materials into new products.

4. *Recover* useful materials or energy from waste.

Adoption of the "Four Rs" should result in a close examination of current waste management practices to see if they are in keeping with the philosophy. Once waste managers begin looking at discarded materials as resources, all manner of opportunities arise.

Individuals should, where practical, incorporate the "Four Rs" into their lifestyles. No one is against recycling, and most Albertans will actively participate if recycling opportunities are conveniently offered. To provide these opportunities the Environment Council's Panel recommended the development of rules or guidelines for goods that conform to the principles of the "Four Rs," and the development of a national recycling symbol for goods to indicate whether the product is recyclable or contains recycled material. These steps, together with consumer education programs and government initiatives to encourage reduction of the amount of waste generated, would provide a means for individuals to choose products that produce a minimum amount of waste. The recently announced "Environmentally Friendly Products" initiative of Environment Canada should address many of these aspects and give consumers the opportunity to make an appropriate choice in product selection. Awareness of recycling opportunities could be increased by implementation of a recycling information telephone line.

Although recycling may have higher initial costs, it conserves resources and offers the economic benefits of job creation and production of useful goods.

The expansion of curbside recycling to a city-wide service in Edmonton was also recommended by the Panel. The city's pilot project was well-received and the availability of curbside recycling is important, not only for the collection of materials and reduction in the amount of waste that must

be landfilled, but as part of the process of creating a public attitude which views waste materials as potential resources. Such an attitude could benefit all recycling programs.

Promotion and Awareness

One program that might benefit from promotion and increased awareness is the "Oil Drop" program, a network of service stations in urban areas at which used motor oil can be left for recycling. A disappointing number of people are aware of this used oil collection program. The Panel recommended development of an effective information program, as well as assistance to the oil re-refining industry to encourage development of a modern used oil re-refinery in Alberta.

Another program to encourage and promote is the collection and recycling of paper from office buildings. To promote such efforts, it was recommended that a municipal bylaw be developed that would provide for adequate, safe and convenient storage space for recyclable materials in new multi-family dwellings, office buildings and shopping malls. As well, the government should develop a "waste audit" program to assess waste

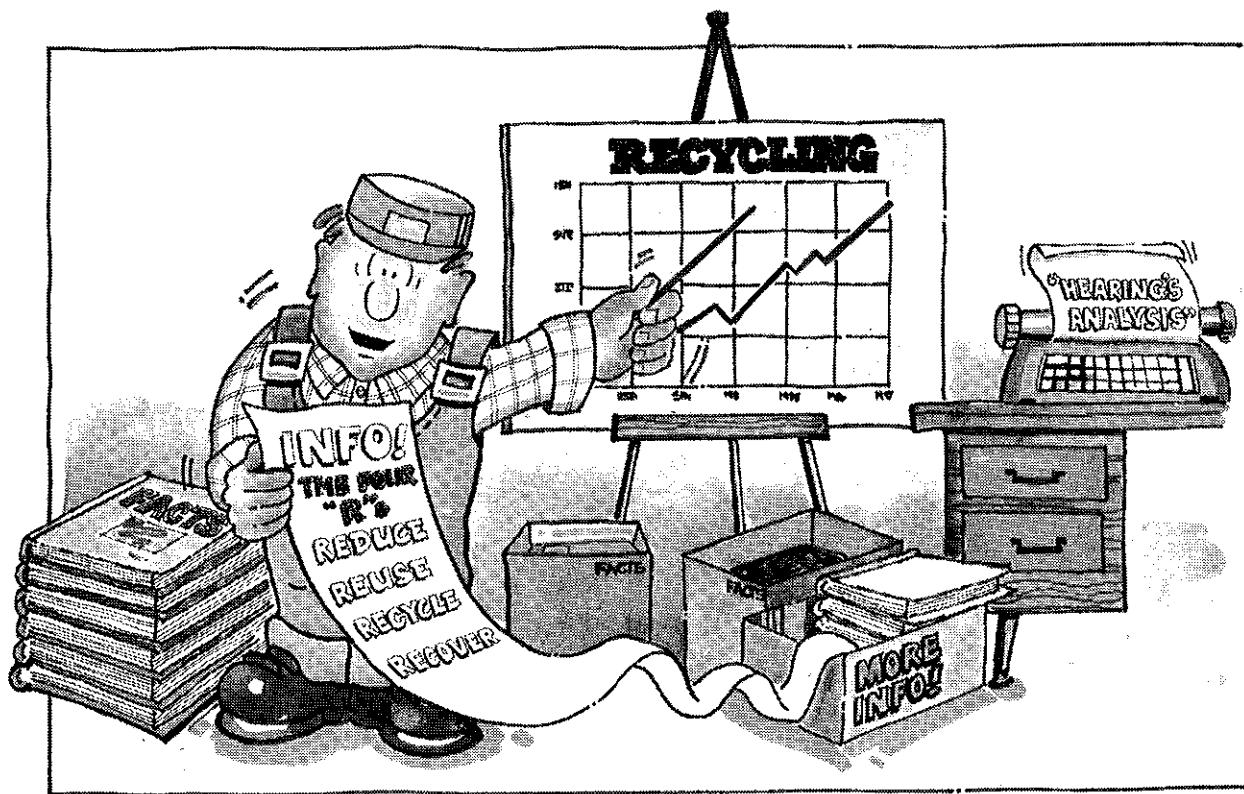
management practices in appropriate industrial and commercial businesses and provide advice on ways to reduce waste generation. The Alberta Waste Materials Exchange could provide an effective means of matching producers and consumers of "waste" materials.

Further efforts are needed to reduce the amount of material landfilled. One opportunity is the composting of organic material which comprises about one-third of the municipal solid waste stream. During the spring and fall garden clean-up period, there is almost double the weight of material landfilled as compared to the winter months.

The Panel recommended an information package on composting methods, experimental composting projects in Edmonton, and composting areas at municipal landfills or other suitable sites. Since that time, the collection and composting of household organic material has been implemented in Ryley, Alberta. This project may eventually lead to wider acceptance of composting schemes for other locations in the province.

The *Beverage Container Act* should also be strengthened. Alberta's Beverage Container Act requires deposits on soft drink containers. The

Environment Council of Alberta



beverage container return system, with its deposit on containers and a network of bottle depots, is the backbone of government support for recycling, as well as a unique approach to controlling littering of beverage containers.

The present bottle depot system could be made more efficient and brought in line with changes in beverage marketing. Recommended changes include:

- inclusion under the Act of all beverages, except milk, and all container types, including "tetrapak,"
- a uniform minimum deposit of 10 cents on all containers, and
- relaxed criteria for licensing bottle depots to encourage competition, efficiency and the recycling of other commodities.

[The Government of Alberta has recently announced changes to the *Beverage Container Act*. These changes, which include the acceptance of additional container types and more uniform deposit and refund prices, are scheduled to take effect in January 1989.]

Networks, Supply and Marketing

An integrated collection network presently moves deposit containers from all parts of Alberta to processing facilities in Calgary and Edmonton. The Panel recommended using this system to gather other recyclables from rural Alberta. Piggy-backing the collection of non-deposit glass, newspaper and cardboard with the collection of beverage containers could bring markets for recovered materials within the economic reach of large parts of Alberta. Initiatives in Edmonton and across the province could greatly increase the supply of recyclable materials.

It is a matter of concern that with increased recycling, there could be an oversupply of some materials. The Panel recognized the need to balance supply and demand. Too many recycling initiatives have floundered, unable to maintain this balance. Alberta is fortunate to have a well-established recycling industry on which to base expansion.

Opportunities exist to develop markets for old corrugated cardboard, ledger paper, cullet for use in fiberglass manufacture and re-refined oil for automotive markets. Paper recovery could expand if overseas markets could be penetrated.

The Environment Council's report made several recommendations to expand the markets for recyclables. Most of these recommendations were directed to the provincial or federal governments. Individuals and municipal authorities should push for provincial action to assist with the development of demand for recycled materials, at the same time that supplies are being increased.

Among the actions recommended by the Panel was the suggestion that the recycling industry be considered as any other manufacturing industry and be eligible for the full range of industrial development grants. Research should be conducted to improve the recycling of post-consumer plastics. A major market survey and feasibility study should be conducted to determine markets for all grades of paper, as well as the feasibility of accessing domestic and foreign markets. The provincial government should investigate the feasibility of requesting that suppliers of paper to the government supply paper containing recycled fiber. A study should be undertaken of the feasibility and economics of supplying cullet for use by the fiberglass industry. The use of re-refined oil should be promoted in federal, provincial and municipal government vehicles. The feasibility of further processing aluminum scrap within Alberta should be investigated.

In summary, the Environment Council of Alberta recognized the desirability of increasing recycling and decreasing society's dependence on landfilling. A long-term goal should be to have most wastes recycled. Government and individuals should promote, by words and by action, a change in attitude to accept "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recover" as its strategy in waste management.

John Lilley is a Senior Research Officer with the Environment Council of Alberta.

This article is a synopsis of the *Technical Report and Recommendations on Recycling of Waste in Alberta*. For copies of the report, the summary report or background reports, contact:

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LEGISLATIVE INCENTIVES TO PROMOTE RECYCLING

Jillian Flett

Managing the mountain of municipal waste generated every year is becoming one of the most pressing problems facing governments. It was recently of particular concern for Edmonton where rapidly shrinking space at the existing landfill, and growing opposition to proposed new landfill sites, made municipal waste management a priority issue for City Council.

The problem of siting new landfills was considered as far back as 1979, when an Edmonton Water and Sanitation evaluation of the remaining life of the Clover Bar landfill found that expansion opportunities at the site were severely limited. A number of alternative sites were considered and until early 1988 the issue was still under consideration.

Municipal waste recycling reduces the amount of waste entering landfills, thereby extending their life and reducing the amount of land needed for landfill activities. It also reduces the demand for natural resources to make new products and the associated demand on the environment. Although landfills will always be required as part of a waste management system, the public are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of recycling and more willing to accept the responsibility to recycle.

The City of Edmonton has commissioned a number of studies into alternative methods to landfill including paper recycling, energy conversion from waste and composting. A recent recycling pilot project in Edmonton was so successful it is now being expanded to a city-wide program which could become one of the more comprehensive voluntary recycling programs in Canada.

Some jurisdictions are going so far as to pass legislation to promote recycling. This article will focus on the existing legislative control over waste management in Edmonton and outline some specific legal incentives that can be implemented to

promote recycling.

Regulating Waste Management

In Alberta, waste management is regulated both at the provincial and municipal level. Pursuant to the Public Health Act, municipalities are required to provide waste management facilities. The Provincial Cabinet may make regulations relating to the "construction, location, operation, maintenance, disinfection, disinfestation and disposition" of waste management facilities. All applications for municipal landfills are approved by the local Board of Health, although Alberta Environment may also have input into permit conditions.

The *Municipal Government Act* allows municipal councils to pass bylaws establishing and maintaining a system for the collection, removal and disposal of garbage throughout the municipality. Edmonton has passed a bylaw allowing the municipality to make such rules as are necessary for the proper operation of a city landfill and transfer station. This bylaw deals with such issues as the collection and transport of waste and waste disposal charges, but it does not consider the issue of recycling.

The main Alberta legislation which indirectly promotes recycling is the *Beverage Container Act*. This Act establishes a deposit and return system for bottles, thereby promoting the collection of recyclable materials. This legislation has been highly successful in eliminating bottles from the waste stream. Since market factors are such that there is demand for this supply, a viable recycling industry for beverage containers now exists in Alberta.

A number of jurisdictions are now looking at legislative incentives to promote recycling. These may consist of:

1. Legislation which promotes the collection of

recyclable materials. This legislation relies on the fact that there is a demand for the collected product in order to *indirectly* promote recycling.

2. Legislation that *directly* promotes recycling through requirements such as mandatory purchase of recyclable materials.

Indirect Promotion

The following is an overview of the more common provisions which indirectly promote recycling through collection legislation.

Voluntary Recycling Legislation. This type of legislation usually requires municipalities to provide recycling opportunities through the development of recycling plans or programs. It does not necessarily require citizen participation in recycling activities. For example, this type of legislation could require that local governments provide recycling depots, curbside collection and educational/promotion programs relating to recycling. Although citizens may not be required to recycle, if they do not voluntarily participate in recycling programs the government may initiate mandatory recycling programs. The State of Oregon has passed a *Recycling Opportunities Act* which has the above provisions.

Mandatory Source Separation. This type of legislation requires homeowners to separate their garbage at home, where it is then collected and taken to recyclers. The legislation specifies those materials which are required to be separated. The definition of recyclable material is often based on economic factors, thereby ensuring a market for the materials that are collected.

This mandatory type of legislation has been passed in Ontario. Both Midland County and Southwest Oxford Township have mandatory recycling bylaws requiring residents to sort newspapers, cardboard, glass bottles, cans and plastic pop bottles. The municipality enforces source separation by refusing to collect garbage from citizens who do not separate their waste, thereby leaving them with no option but to deliver their own garbage to the landfill or comply with the legislation.

Deposit Legislation. This type of legislation charges a deposit on recyclable items. This deposit is refunded when the item is returned to be recycled. As previously mentioned, this method has been successfully used in Alberta to promote

bottle recycling. It has also been used in Rhode Island to promote battery recycling.

Direct Promotion

The following are examples of legislation that *directly* promote recycling.

Mandatory Purchase of Recyclable Materials. This type of legislation requires governments to purchase recycled products, thereby increasing their demand. An example of this legislation is Maryland's *Procurement Act* which requires that at least 40 percent of government paper be made from recycled fiber.

Product Bans/Packaging Restrictions. This legislation bans the sale of specific products (e.g. non-recyclable plastics) or specifies product design standards (e.g. restricting excess packaging). The goal is to promote the use of recyclable containers and reduce packaging, thereby reducing the amount of waste. An example of this legislation is the Massachusetts *Packaging Reduction Act* which imposes a fee on packaging and provides offset credits to those firms using recycled products.

Mandatory Labeling/Coding of Recyclable Products. This type of legislation identifies recycled products for the consumer, thereby promoting and increasing their sales.

Tax Breaks/Grants/Loans. This type of legislation promotes recycling by making recycled products relatively less expensive, thereby making them more attractive to consumers. This is accomplished through tax breaks, loans and grants to recyclers. Alberta has established a Resource Recovery Program wherein the Alberta Government provides financial assistance to non-profit organizations for capital costs of purchasing recycling equipment. However, there is no legislative basis for this program.

Fees. Some legislation imposes a fee on the sale of new items to collect funds for recycling programs. For example, Oregon charges a \$1.00 fee on each new vehicle tire sold. This revenue is used to finance the clean up of old tire sites and to provide financial incentives to recycle tires.

Edmonton's Approach

Edmonton is taking a non-legislative, voluntary approach to promote recycling. It remains to be seen how effective this approach will be. In-

creased public concern with environmental issues, the high cost of land and public reluctance to the siting of new landfills, will all promote public acceptance of the recycling option. The City of Edmonton must now look at the record of other jurisdictions that have adopted the legislative approach and determine its applicability to the Edmonton situation.

It is clear that recycling is a concept whose time has come. We must now ensure adoption of the most appropriate methods to make recycling an important and integral part of Edmonton's long term municipal waste management plan.

Jillian Flett is an Environmental Consultant based in Edmonton.

PROFILE: PAPER CHASE RECYCLING

A local community-minded company is doing a lot more than recycling several thousand tons of paper annually — it is also helping to recycle the hopes and dreams of young Edmontonians.

“We’re providing gainful employment and assisting young people to develop, along with providing a convenient, cost-effective way of recycling paper for Edmonton businesses,” says Paper Chase Recycling general manager Roger Swetnam.

The project, which came to life with help from all levels of government, hires unemployed teens for six months under federal wage subsidy programs. As they near the end of their tenure employees are given a letter of reference, a resume and job search counselling. Several have also moved into positions in the core group of employees at Paper Chase.

Many city and provincial offices, along with private industry, are serviced by Paper Chase. “We’ve had good early support from private business. They see the value in it, and they’re saving money.”

Offices are set-up with desk-top recycling boxes and bins. Employees simply fill up the boxes instead of the waste baskets. The boxes are then emptied into the bins, which are picked up by the company. Edmonton City Hall alone produces up to one ton of paper daily, and the Alberta Legislature cut its waste disposal by one-half in just two weeks.

Once picked up and back at the plant, the paper is sorted, graded and bailed to be shipped to manufacturers who turn it back into a useable form.

A tiered system allows Paper Chase employees the opportunity to work their way up the ladder, complete with incremental raises and pay bonuses for quality work, said Swetnam. It gives them a chance to explore various job scenarios, picking up a variety of experiences, from truck driving to meeting with customers on a one-to-one basis.

While the company’s mandate is “training young people,” it is also moving toward self-sufficiency. Talks with the city could result in Paper Chase earning an extra \$250 000 annually, because of the savings resulting from 250 tonnes of paper a month no longer ending up at the city dump.

“It would certainly help us, and provide us with some security until we develop as a business, but we’ll always be non-profit. We’re here to benefit the community by using community resources better. It’s not waste paper, it’s a resource. And our young people are a very important resource.”

— *Edmonton Examiner*, 30 October 1988

EDMONTON RECYCLING SOCIETY

Kathy Vandergrift



This fall every household in Edmonton became a proud owner of a blue recycling box, complete with operator's manual. When residents on the north side of the city recycle their glass, tin and paper they will also be creating jobs for persons who have difficulty finding employment.

Reducing waste and creating jobs for less advantaged persons are the two goals of the non-profit Edmonton Recycling Society (ERS), which won a contract from the city to operate the recycling program on the north side. A contract for the south side was given to Browning, Ferris Industries (BFI), one of the multi-national garbage giants. Because the two projects will be compared, community-based economic development as well as recycling will be on trial in Edmonton.

Resisting a Trend

Recycling is becoming big business in North America. By giving a major contract to a non-profit group, the City of Edmonton resisted that trend in favor of more local benefits. Edmonton also leads western Canadian cities with the implementation of a city-wide curbside collection system. That is the result of a long battle by recycling advocates to convince city hall that recycling is good economics and that people will participate if it is made convenient. Alderman Jan Reimer used the garbage dump debate, and the positive results of a pilot recycling project in three neighbourhoods, to gain the support of the whole council for city-wide recycling. Starting with paper, glass and tin, the program will eventually expand to include plastics, cardboard, wood, oil and other recyclable materials.

The Edmonton Recycling Society (ERS) proposal was initiated by the Mennonite Central Committee and Citizens for Public Justice. The proposal presented a community-based economic development approach intended to maximize local benefits. Organizers saw two major advantages to this approach.

1. Residents would be more motivated to take the extra time to sort their garbage if they knew that the benefits were being used in the community, as well as reducing the quantity of garbage.

2. Successful projects in other cities showed the potential for creating employment opportunities and job training for people who have difficulty finding jobs in the regular labour market. The proposal was developed as a model for the integration of environmental, social and economic goals. This is community-based economic development on a grand scale. The project has received support from a wide variety of church and community groups.

The Benefits of ERS

The Edmonton Recycling Society project had its first battle at city hall. Dubbed the million dollar option, because of higher initial costs, ERS had to prove that the additional benefits made its proposal a good buy for the city. A full cost-benefit analysis showed that, in the long term, the extra initial public costs were balanced by greater public benefit. Financing requirements for a new non-profit venture with higher initial costs had to be weighed against the fact that competitors would later charge more to add on additional products.

Every ton of paper recycled saves approximately 125 cubic feet of space in the local landfill.

Every ton of paper recycled saves from 11-17 trees.

Processing recycled paper requires 50% less energy than the manufacturing of virgin pulp and paper.

The outcome of a drawn-out city hall debate was the classic split contract and an agreement that ERS will return to the city half of the revenue generated beyond operating costs. Besides creating jobs and training, the other half will be used to develop non-residential recycling, new markets and uses for recycled products, and the creation of a benefit-sharing plan for the workers. In the final analysis, all revenue will be returned to the community because no one is making a profit.

Edmonton has already seen some of the benefits of the ERS approach. Instead of having the blue boxes shipped from Ontario or the United States, ERS worked with a local plastics firm to make them here, using some recycled plastic and creating local jobs. Renovation of the old Cromdale bus barns is being done with furnishings recycled from a Calgary office building. This is practicing what we preach!

In addition to the curbside collection system, ERS will operate a depot. Apartment dwellers and people outside the city have already indicated that they will bring their materials to the depot in support of the twin objectives.

ERS hopes to employ up to 50 people. A training program for mentally handicapped adults is being developed, based on the need here and successful projects elsewhere. Some people have suggested that the mentally handicapped should not be expected to sort garbage. But the very notion that valuable resources are considered garbage is the basic attitude that needs to be changed. Why is cutting down trees considered an important contribution to our economy, while reusing paper is considered degrading? Such attitudes have their root in the false belief that the world will infinitely support wasteful exploitation of natural resources. On the other hand, respect for the world of which human beings are one part would make recycling a noble profession. Perhaps the mentally handicapped are wiser than the critics. Within two hours of a radio interview on this matter, before the project was approved, three handicapped persons called to ask if they could be hired.

Challenges Ahead

Maintaining a high participation rate will be the next major challenge. The pilot project showed that, with the inclusion of a strong public relations

PROFILE: RECYCLE MAGIC

Among a handful of novel applications for "garbage" in Alberta is the one practiced joyfully by a new organization in Edmonton called "The Imagination Market." This is a non-profit arts and recycling group recently introduced to Edmonton and located in WECAN's Harcourt House at 10215-112 Street.

The Imagination Market began in Vancouver over 10 years ago. It is now busily recycling there, in other British Columbia locations, and now in Edmonton.

The Imagination Market collects and recycles by-products, overruns, off-cuts and discards from local manufacturing and other businesses for use as art materials. These materials are made available through the Market's Harcourt House retail store and through "Junque Mail" order and workshops.

The goals of The Imagination Market are:

- to collect and supply materials which would normally be discarded,

- to educate people of all ages in new, practical and creative uses for these materials,

- to promote the benefits of and inspire people about recycling, reclaiming and re-using materials, and

- to recycle a multitude of materials to the community rather than to the landfill.

Teachers, parents, artists, children, students, group leaders - in fact everyone - can be stimulated and find creative outlets at The Imagination Market.

Visit the Market or bring the Market to your home, office or school. Find out how one person's garbage can be another person's treasure. Let your imagination soar in the Market's world of "Haute Junque." For more information on how you and/or your organization can get involved in the magic of creative recycling, contact Shelley Smith at 403/426-1862.

program, 70 percent of the households participated regularly and the garbage collected was reduced by seven percent. ERS is aiming for a 15 percent reduction at minimum. With co-operation in expanding the program, a 25 to 30 percent reduction is a reasonable goal. Other cities have done it, why not Edmonton?

Public education about the benefits of recycling is part of the ERS plan. When people know that it takes 95 percent less energy to recycle an aluminum can than to make a new one, it is easier to take the extra time to keep it separate from other garbage. If people know that one household's annual supply of newspaper will nearly insulate a house and save several trees, saving the paper is a good return for the small investment of extra effort. Glass can be reused many times with no loss of quality — why throw it out? The support of many church and community groups will be helpful in the public education task.

To recycle aluminum requires only 4% of the energy required to extract aluminum from ore.

More than 35% of Canada's residential waste is made up of packaging materials, and the quantity is growing every year.

Another major challenge will be to find markets for the volume of materials collected. Recycling needs a systems approach, involving individuals, businesses, communities and public policies. Pursued systematically, recycling offers an opportunity to truly diversify Alberta's economy and create a wide variety of employment opportunities. Many opportunities are now being lost because we lack the political will to change public policies that work against, rather than for, recycling.

Two years ago public hearings on recycling by

the Environment Council of Alberta resulted in a number of solid recommendations. While there has been some progress on small items, the major goal of a level playing field for recycling has not been pursued. As one of the members of ERS, Citizens for Public Justice is encouraging citizens to ask their provincial representatives to take action now, not further study, on the recommendations.

Full-cost accounting is the first crucial step. The cost of waste disposal must be built into the use of particular products. A cheap "MacDonald's" meal may not be so cheap anymore. The value of energy saved by recycling resources should also be counted as a benefit when considering the economic viability of recycling programs. Public subsidies for landfill costs should be transferred to recycling.

Recycling industries should have the same tax advantages and economic incentives as mining and pulp and paper industries do. Right now, large amounts of public money subsidize the extraction of new resources (e.g. pulp industries, mining), while recycling industries must prove themselves to be economically viable.

The major rationale for doing nothing is the notion that the government should not interfere in marketplace economics. The reality is that public policies are interfering against recycling. A level playing field seems the least acceptable position, given the growing concern about our environment. Perhaps an example will help.

While ERS wants to collect plastics, the city is holding back because of unsure markets. However, true entrepreneurs have come forward to say that if enough is collected, plastics recycling would be viable. If our public leaders put even one-tenth of the effort into promoting recycling as they do facilitating the oil industry, Alberta could have more jobs of a wider variety, including low skill jobs, as well as less garbage.

Edmonton residents are leading the way with their blue boxes. Will the provincial government complete the circle by replacing token gestures with a systematic, comprehensive plan for recycling in Alberta?

Kathy Vandergrift is the Executive Director of Citizens for Public Justice.

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COUNCIL NEWS



NEW PUBLICATION

The Social Research Directory
The 1989 Social Research Directory is now available at the Council office.

This publication lists 80 libraries and resource centres in Edmonton which collect information on social issues. Outlined in each entry are: the major subjects collected, the size and content of the collection, reference services provided, and details concerning the facility's circulation policy.

For more information, or to purchase your copy, contact the Edmonton Social Planning Council, #41, 9912 - 106 Street, Edmonton, T5K 1C5. Telephone 423-2031. \$9.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling.

BROWN BAG FORUMS

December 14th
"Changes in the Child Welfare Act"
12:10 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.
(speaker to be announced)

January 11th
"Johnny Came Back to School and Still Can't Read" - Adult Illiteracy
12:10 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.
Speaker: Rolf Pritchard
Department Head
Adult Basic Education
Edmonton Public Schools

Department of Continuing Education.

Brown Bag Forums are held in the 3rd Floor Boardroom, 9912 - 106 Street.

NEWS and VIEWS

"Health Care for Albertans: Making a Good Health Care System Better"

Canada's health care system is one of the best. Rising costs have led to actions by the Alberta government to reduce coverage, freeze fees and de-insure services. These actions have eroded our health care system. Instead of throwing more money at health care, or cutting back services still further, we need a more effective allocation of resources and new kinds of institutions.

This brief, which was presented to the Premier's Commission on Future Health Care for Albertans, describes how we can make a good health care system better, at little or no extra cost. The six recommendations and background discussion are intended to stimulate discussion about practical and effective solutions that Albertans can pursue.

Copies of the brief can be purchased from the Council office for \$3.50 (postage and handling included).