

1

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR CERTIFIED COMPOSTABLE BAGS

The Environmental Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated February 17, 2011, from the Commissioner of Environmental Services.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. The Regional Clerk circulate this report to the Clerks of the local municipalities.

2. PURPOSE

This report provides information on the communication, education and monitoring activities planned in support of the mandatory use of certified compostable bags starting May 1, 2011.

3. BACKGROUND

Report No. 4 Clause 2 of the Environmental Services Committee – Regional Council Meeting of December 16, 2009 approved the mandatory use of compostable bags in the Green Bin program starting May 1, 2011.

Residents across the Region have responded enthusiastically to the Green Bin program. The foundation of York Region's enhanced Green Bin program built upon flexibility and convenience has resulted in high participation rates and high diversion. With the exception of Toronto, most municipal source separated organics programs do not permit plastic bag liners in their program. Comparing data across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) municipalities indicates that in 2009, York Region's program is the most successful in terms of household participation. Table 1 illustrates the comparison between York's participation in the Green Bin program and other municipalities in the GTA.

Table 1
2009 Comparison of Participation in Green Bin Programs in the Greater Toronto Area

Municipality	Acceptable Liners	Acceptable Material Distinctions	Green Bin materials collected curbside/Household Serviced (Kg)
York Region	Plastic or compostable bags	Includes diapers, pet waste and sanitary products	318
City of Toronto	Plastic Bags	Includes diapers, pet waste and sanitary products	225*
Durham Region	Compostable bags only	Excludes diapers, pet waste and sanitary products	151
Peel Region	Compostable bags only	Excludes diapers, pet waste and sanitary products	117

*City of Toronto tonnages decreased in 2009 due to strike by Toronto municipal employees

Since 2005, plastic bags have been accepted in the Green Bin program to encourage resident participation. Plastic bags have provided a free convenient option for residents that also addressed the “yuck” factor associated with Green Bin compostable material. With the Green Bin’s success and well established participation levels the Region is ready to take the next step to improving the Green Bin program. Audit results indicate that six per cent by weight of the Green Bin material collected is plastic bags. The use of compostable bags as liners in the Green Bin will reduce residual waste generated by plastic bags, improve efficiencies with source separated organics processing and ultimately improve the quality of the composted end product.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Comprehensive communication campaign on switching to certified compostable bags will be launched March 2011

A communication and education campaign will be launched to continue to address the Green Bin program change and create heightened awareness with residents about the mandatory switch to compostable bags. The campaign will also educate residents on why plastic bags are not a sustainable option for the Green Bin program.

The communication campaign will focus on a period of four months from April 2011 until the end of July 2011. Print advertising in local newspapers will primarily run from

March 2011 until the end of June 2011, and will be repeated intermittently throughout the remainder of the year.

The campaign will be promoted through distribution of informational material, attendance at public events, paid advertising, and promotional support by the local municipalities via websites, signage, waste calendars and information distribution.

Communication tactics will include:

- In-person promotion (stores, events, home shows, etc.)
- Use of the Three Stream Team Vehicle at events
- Paid advertising (print advertising in newspapers)
- Truck Signage (signage on municipal collection trucks)
- Point of Sale Materials (signs positioned in-store at the shelf where compostable bags are located)
- Mobile Signs
- Website
- Distribution of Green Bin brochure (events, local municipalities, home shows, etc.)
- Media Releases
- York Works
- Local municipal newsletters and waste calendars

The campaign will provide residents with access to more information on compostable bags and the Green Bin, and will address basic questions about the use of compostable bags, such as:

- Why it is important not to use plastic bags
- How to identify certified compostable bags
- When compostable bags will be mandatory for use
- Environmental benefits of compostable bags
- Listing of retail outlets stocking compostable bags

Focus groups reveal need for additional education on environmental impacts of plastic bags

Focus groups were conducted in May 2010 to identify any barriers and misconceptions residents may have on using compostable bags and to provide key feedback for designing an effective communication campaign. Results of the focus groups revealed that there was a general lack of understanding on the environmental impacts of plastic bags. There was also minimal knowledge on compostable bags including costs and where they could be purchased. Cost was identified as the most significant barrier in compostable bag use. Focus group results indicated a need to communicate why plastic bags are not an environmentally healthy choice to help build support and understanding for the switch to compostable bags.

It was also established that the strongest motivating message is to reinforce the regulation that plastic bags are no longer accepted in the Green Bin, revealing that residents are motivated by regulations and the desire to be in compliance.

A plastic bag levy was implemented by the City of Toronto as a by-law under the *City of Toronto Act (2006)* to discourage single use of plastic shopping bags. Following the City of Toronto's implementation, some retailers have chosen to implement it as a corporate policy across the GTA, provincially and nationally. It has been reported by the Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors that there has been a 71% drop in the number of plastic bags distributed since the plastic bag fee came into effect.

York Region has not implemented a bag fee policy or by-law. The Region is governed by the *Municipal Act (2001)* and does not have the same legislative powers as the City of Toronto to create this type of by-law.

Mandatory use will be monitored through audits of material by local municipalities

Detailed waste audits for each local municipality will be performed by a third-party auditor prior to the launch of the promotional campaign to determine a baseline level of plastic bags in the source separated organics stream. Detailed audits will also be performed six months and one year after the promotional campaign is launched. Funds for audits have been allocated in the 2011 budget. Staff will report back to council upon completion of the one year post-launch waste audits of the mandatory use program to assess the need for Regional by-law.

Report No. 4 Clause 2 of the Environmental Services Committee – Regional Council Meeting of December 16, 2009 approved that Council request amendments to the local waste collection by-laws to support mandatory use of compostable bags in the Source Separated Organics program. Enforcement at curbside is a local municipal responsibility.

Table 2 provides an overview of waste collection by-laws amended to date.

Table 2
Local Municipal Waste Collection By-law Amendments

Waste Collection By-law Amended	Waste Collection By-law Amendment in Progress	Waste Collection By-law Not Amended
Town of Aurora	Town of Georgina	Town of Markham
Town of East Gwillimbury	King Township	Town of Newmarket
City of Vaughan	Town of Richmond Hill	
Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville		

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total cost for communication and education activities planned in support of the mandatory use of certified compostable bags is \$357,000 as previously approved in Report No. 4 Clause 2 of the Environmental Services Committee – Regional Council Meeting of December 16, 2009. Funds were allocated in the approved 2010 budget and carried forward. Table 3 provides a breakdown of the costs, excluding staff time.

Table 3
Estimated Costs for Implementation of Compostable Bag Strategy

Tactic	Details	Cost (\$)
Displays	In-person promotion at events	4,000
Paid Advertising	Newspaper advertising throughout 2011	174,000
Truck Signage	Side panels on municipal collection trucks	50,000
Point of Sale Materials	Shelf talkers in-store	14,000
Signage	Mobile Signs	16,000
Direct Mail	Information postcard sent to each household	53,000
Transit Advertising	Posters displayed on transit shelters and buses	30,000
Municipal Calendars	Advertising within 2012 calendars	6,000
Brochures	Print production	10,000
Total Cost		\$357,000

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region has worked closely with local municipalities to develop and finalize communication and education campaign material through staff working groups. Support from the local municipalities to communicate program information and program changes is necessary to deliver a consistent message to residents and ensure the successful switch to the use of compostable bags in the Green Bin program. Local municipalities continue to express a high level of unease regarding the switch to mandatory compostable bag liners for the Green Bin program. Issues of specific concern to local municipalities regarding the mandatory use program include public acceptance, participation rates, performance in multi-residential buildings, costs and challenges associated with enforcement.

7. CONCLUSION

The goal of the compostable bag campaign is to facilitate transition to mandatory use of compostable bags in the Green Bin while maintaining resident participation in the program. The campaign will inform residents about the program change while also

educating residents on why this change is better for the environment and the Green Bin program overall.

Once the campaign is launched, staff will further evaluate the need for ongoing reinforcement in the form of additional advertising and educational opportunities.

For more information on this report, please contact Laura McDowell, Director Environmental Promotion and Protection at (905)830-4444 Ext. 5077.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.