

1

UPDATE ON BAN ON PLASTIC BAGS FOR COLLECTION OF YARD WASTE

The Solid Waste Management Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, August 16, 2005, from the Commissioner of Transportation and Works:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update Committee and Council on the success of the ban prohibiting disposal of yard waste in plastic bags at Regionally owned and/or contracted facilities, and its associated education program.

3. BACKGROUND

In November of 2004, an Ipsos Reid survey of local residents suggested that the vast majority of local residents supported the use of kraft paper bags and reusable containers in place of plastic bags for the management of leaf and yard waste. In the Region's contract with Halton Recycling Ltd. (HRL), a 17% reduction in the cost to process the Region's leaf and yard waste was included if the use of plastic bags for collection was eliminated at any point during the duration of the contract.

As a result, on October 6, 2004, Regional Council adopted Clause 1 of Report No. 10 of the Transportation and Works Committee recommending that local municipalities be advised that yard waste in plastic bags will no longer be received at Regionally owned and/or contracted facilities. The ban took effect as of January 1st, 2005.

4. ANALYSIS

Regional staff were directed to implement a promotion and education campaign to inform residents of the rationale for the kraft yard waste bag program and its implications. The campaign, developed in cooperation with local municipal staff, consisted of four elements including general and targeted advertising, public outreach, communications and feed back mechanisms and operational changes.

Based on requests received from local municipal councillors and staff, a temporary grace period was established for the first month of collection. This grace period allowed residents an opportunity to clear out material accumulated from the fall of 2003 without having to re-bag it. Since the grace period, yard waste received at the Region's yard waste contractor (i.e. Halton Recycling Ltd.) has been almost completely free of plastic providing further evidence that residents are complying with the ban.

Initial concerns were also raised that the ban on plastic bags would result in an increase in illegal disposal of yard waste as garbage. In fact, the Region's diversion rate of yard waste has steadily increased despite the dry summer encountered this year.

4.1 Promotion and Education Campaign

During the week of April 4 to 8, 2005, over 250,000 information packages were distributed to curbside households throughout the Region informing residents about the ban. The mail-out, titled "Tools to Tackle your Yard Waste" contained a bright yellow waterproof yard waste sticker for reusable containers, information regarding the ban, and a 10% discount card for the purchase of kraft paper bags at selected retailers. The yellow sticker, developed in cooperation with local municipal staff, allowed residents to use a reusable container to set out their yard waste for collection in place of kraft paper bags. The yard waste stickers have proven to be very popular. To date, over 12,000 additional stickers have been requested by local residents. The discount card was created with the cooperation of Home Depot, Home Hardware and Canadian Tire (the three major bag distributors in the Region) for use by York Region residents from April to November 30, 2005.

To further promote the change, the following activities occurred between the months of April to June 2005. Full colour, full page advertisements were placed in all local York Region newspapers. Overhead banners and street-side signage were used throughout the Region. Full color posters were erected at various Community Centres, Libraries and Civic Centres. Numerous articles were published in the local newspapers, and in various newsletters including York Works. Banners or informational "shelf talkers" were erected in over 130 local, retail stores selling yard waste bags across the Region. A series of brochures on grasscycling, leaf mulching and composting were designed to assist residents with managing their yard waste at home. Regional employees also staffed booths at over nine community events throughout the various local municipalities to provide outreach to residents on the ban and conduct feedback surveys. A Regional hotline was also established and its number publicized on all Regional promotional materials to provide a central point of contact for local residents with questions or concerns about the change.

Feedback received from local residents about the promotional campaign proved to be very positive. Almost all residents indicated that they were aware of the ban and the majority were supportive of it.

4.2 Call Centre

Concerns were initially raised that the ban on plastic bags would generate a large volume of calls from residents. To ensure adequate staffing to manage these calls, the Town of Newmarket Call Centre was contracted to handle residential inquiries generated by Regional promotional activities and redirected by local municipalities. Newmarket's Call Centre staff have been excellent and has provided the Region with a cost effective service. The partnership with the Newmarket Call Centre has proven to be an effective example of Regional/local municipal cooperation.

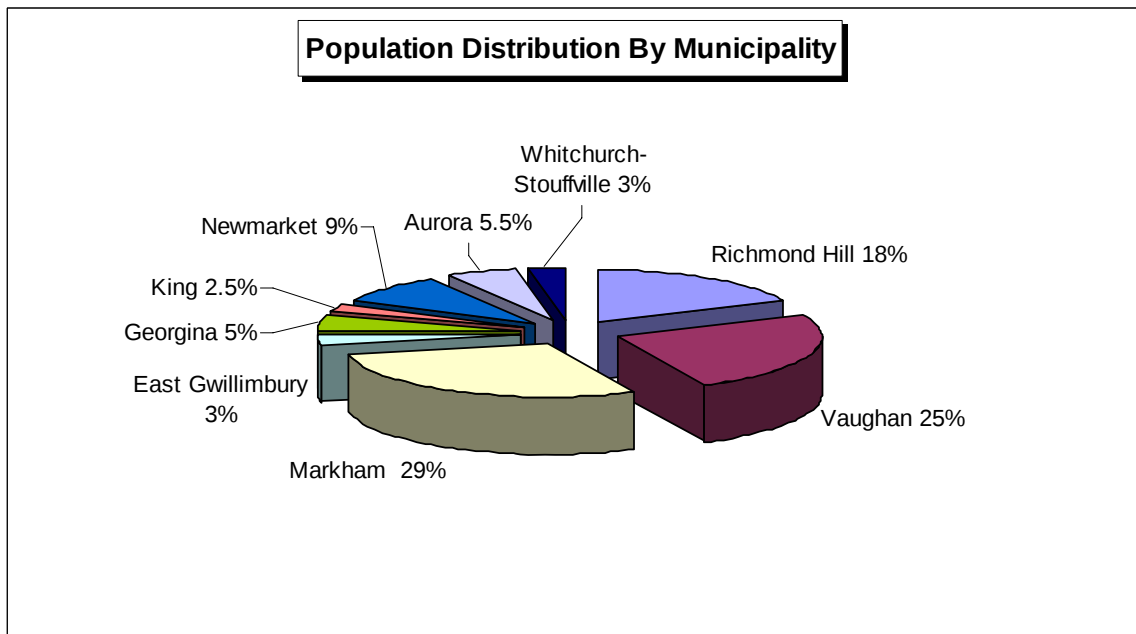
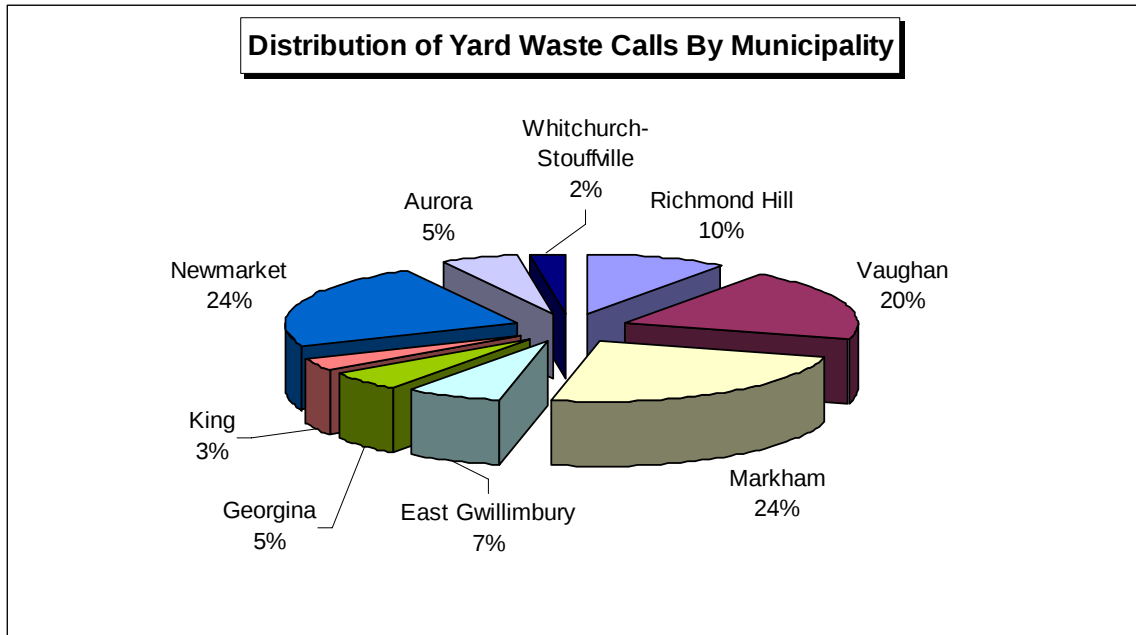
From April 4 to July 31, 2005, the Call Centre received 1,081 calls (see Table 1). This number represents less than 1% of local households. Of these calls, approximately 70% were inquiries related to the yard waste package and requests for additional yard waste stickers. Twenty-five percent of the calls were related to collection issues (i.e. clarification regarding collection dates and acceptable material and missed collections) and the final 5% of the calls were complaint related. Of the approximately 54 complaint calls received to date, half were related to displeasure with kraft paper bags and the remaining half were related to collection issues (i.e. infrequent collection dates and grass clippings not being collected). The low number of complaints received is consistent with the Ipsos-Reid survey conducted in November 2004, which found that approximately 90% of residents support using kraft paper bags or reusable containers for yard waste.

Table 1
Nature of Calls Received by the Region Regarding Yard Waste

Reason for the Call	Number of Calls Received
Information requests	757
Collection issues	270
Complaints	54

Figure 1 refers to the distribution of calls by municipality and highlights the percentage of population for each municipality for comparative purposes. With the exception of the Town of Newmarket, the distribution of calls is consistent with the percentage of population in each area. The Town of Newmarket volumes are elevated due to initial tracking of incoming general inquiries about yard waste collection to the Town as being associated with the Region's promotional activities.

Figure 1



4.3 Operational Issues

Initial concerns were raised about the cost, capacity and durability of kraft paper bags. To address these concerns a number of alternative options were created for local residents

including the 10% discount card, ability to use a reusable container in place of kraft bags and access to Halton Recycling Ltd.'s public drop off free of charge. Some of the local municipalities also increased collection frequencies to ensure adequate service was provided.

Feedback received to date from the Region's retail partners (i.e., Home Hardware, Home Depot, Canadian Tire) indicates that the 10% discount card provided to residents has been extremely popular and purchases of kraft bags have been good. In addition, the overwhelming requests for yard waste stickers indicate that a large portion of residents are using reusable containers for their material.

With respect to durability, the City of Toronto has tested kraft bags in inclement weather throughout the year and collection crews reported they were still able to pick up the bags intact. Further studies conducted by Regional staff confirm that kraft paper bags can hold approximately 87 pounds of material (equal to or more than plastic bags) and can also hold the same volume as plastic bags.

Sporadic problems with kraft bags have been encountered in some municipalities. Most of the complaints are originating from municipalities that offer only monthly or bi-monthly collection and accept grass. Initial research conducted by Regional and municipal staff showed the bags last between 2 to 12 weeks depending on the type of material placed in them. Bags of grass clippings tended to break down more rapidly than bags containing leaves and other yard waste. Attachment 1 refers to the collection frequencies and grass acceptance by municipality.

In addition, feedback from residents suggests that they are not willing to store their yard waste for up to a month, irrespective of whether the material is in kraft bags or plastic bags due to concerns with lack of storage capacity and/or odours. Some residents have suggested that they are not fully participating in the program and rather than holding on to the material until the next yard waste collection, they put in the garbage.

Residents who have called with concerns have been offered copies of the Region's new grasscycling, composting and leaf mulching brochures. They are also encouraged to use reusable containers where practical and redirect larger quantities of yard waste to HRL free of charge.

4.4 Fall Campaign

This fall, additional full colour, full page newspaper advertisements will be placed in the local newspapers throughout the Region. These ads will be translated into Cantonese, Urdu and Italian and placed in ethnic papers including the Ming Pao, Lo Specchio and the Pakistani Star which are distributed across the Region. The ads will run in October and again in November.

The Newmarket Call Centre will continue to handle and monitor the yard waste calls on behalf of the Region.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A \$10/tonne reduction in processing costs was originally negotiated as part of the contract with Halton Recycling Ltd. This reduction in cost represents a savings of over \$200,000/year to the Region. These savings have been used in 2005 to promote the ban on plastic bags.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Discussions with local municipalities regarding the impact of the ban on plastic bags suggest their experiences are consistent with that of the Region. While some complaints have been received regarding the ban, the majority of calls received have been regarding collection and requests for yard waste stickers.

Some municipalities have also increased collection frequency to address potential concerns with kraft bag durability.

7. CONCLUSION

On January 1, 2005, the Region stopped accepting yard waste in plastic bags at Regionally owned and/or contracted facilities. To educate residents about the ban on plastic bags, the Region, with input from the local municipalities, developed and implemented a promotion and education campaign. To date, awareness of the ban amongst residents is high and compliance is good. Overall feedback from residents about the change has been overwhelmingly positive and the change appears to be progressing successfully.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

(The attachment referred to in this clause is included with this report.)