

LET'S TALK TRASH – MARCH 2021

RBC - satellite depot: Over the past few years, the news has been flooded with articles about the challenges of the global recycling system. With China and other nations shutting their doors to receiving loads of dirty recyclables from around the world, many places, including parts of Canada, have been left scrambling to find recycling processing facilities. There is truth to the challenges of the recycling system. Add to this the fact that reusing and reducing our consumption in the first place are more sustainable actions.

All that said, BC is leading the way when it comes to processing residential packaging and printed paper (PPP) as locally as possible. Beyond this, BC is also a leader in making the producers of PPP responsible for the financing and operation of a province wide recycling system for residential PPP.

In 2011, the BC Ministry of Environment passed a law to transfer the cost of recycling from residents to producers. Multi-Material BC (MMBC), a not-for-profit organization responsible for residential packaging and paper recycling in BC, was officially launched in 2014 and the name was changed to Recycle BC (RBC) in 2017. According to the RBC's 2019 Annual Report, the organization provides PPP recycling services to approximately 98% of BC residents in urban, rural and First Nations communities.

RBC is the only Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program for packaging and paper product in North America. Retailers, manufacturers and other organizations that supply packaging and paper products (PPP) to BC residents are responsible for collecting and recycling these when residents are finished with them. EPR is a way for businesses to manage the environmental impact of product life cycle from selecting material used in production to collection and recycling. This obligation is fulfilled through stewards becoming members of Recycle BC and by filing a report each year that identifies the types and quantities of PPP supplied into the BC marketplace. Based on this report, producers pay fees that help finance RBC's services.

The most significant advantages of EPR programs are the rigorous process they demand; the requirement to report verified results, annual reports, the commitment to transparency and, most of all, the steadfast focus on environmental outcomes - all of which are overseen by the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. This is a robust recycling system that demands accountability.

Again, according to their 2019 Annual Report, RBC's plastic packaging, paper products, glass and metal containers are currently collected, processed and sold as follows:

- More than 98% of plastics collected in BC are sold to end markets in BC with a local end market in Metro Vancouver where they are processed into pellets to be recycled into new packaging and products;

- Glass collected through Recycle BC is sold to end markets in BC to be processed into new bottles, sandblast material or construction aggregate;
- Metal containers are sold to end markets in BC, Ontario and the United States; and recycled into new packaging and sheet metal;

Paper is sold to end markets overseas, the United States and BC where it is processed into egg cartons, boxes and other paper products.

This all sounds great for us until we remember that the Lasqueti depot isn't part of RBC. Our depot collects and handles material according to RBC standards but we are still waiting to be recognized and accepted back in the program as a principal depot. While we are waiting (Lasqueti being part of RBC is a priority for the qRD) there is a bit of good news. The Lasqueti Recycling depot has, just this month, been designated as an RBC satellite depot. By definition, an RBC satellite depot means: an approved depot from which a contractor transports PPP to a designated principal depot for pick-up by a post-collection service provider. The new plan for Lasqueti is to transport recycling to Powell River, via barge (the same one that now takes our garbage) to an approved baling facility. The qRD and its taxpayers are still on the hook for ALL of the transportation costs in getting the material there. We'll still be paying a significant cost, which will be funded once the Lasqueti depot is back in the RBC program as a principal depot.

Being a recognized satellite depot will mean some saved money since the qRD will no longer have to pay recycling fees and the cost of barging and trucking are also less. Up until now, the qRD and taxpayers had to pay per tonne of material to private recycling facilities for them to accept Lasqueti's collected material (there is next to no money in the recycling business!). With Lasqueti designated as a satellite depot, the qRD will receive some incentives (money) per tonne of material, which will help somewhat to offset costs.

Here's to a step in a more financially sustainable direction, with a bigger leap expected down the road. In the meantime, please continue to do your part in reducing the amount of packaging you bring onto the island in the first place by: buying in bulk, supporting low packaging companies, thrifting, carrying your own bags and water bottles, and delivering your recycling clean, dry, and pre-sorted to the recycling depot.