Beyond the Blue Box

The Bluewater Recycling Facility takes a wide variety of materials, but there are exceptions. Learn why it takes time to accept new items.

A Slow Process...

...that even a snail could appreciate! This is the reality when it comes to a recycling company accepting new materials. While in a perfect world, we would love to recycle every possible material we can - there are barriers, bottlenecks and financial burdens that simply disallow collecting everything. Read below to learn more about our three step approach to materials, why we can't accept some materials, and where we are heading next.

Where We Come From

The average Bluewater Recycling Association household generates 77% less waste today than it did in 1987.
The amount of waste generated by the average household in 1987 was 920kg per year, or nearly one tonne. The average rural household in Ontario in 2008 disposed about 544kg. We are proud to report that our average households are disposing a mere 214kg per year. These numbers are not only impressive, but some of the best in Ontario and Canada exceeding all goals. The current Ontario government goal is to reduce the amount of waste disposed by households by 60% (368kg) by 2008. We are far beyond that goal, and aim to push the envelope even further.

What's In The Bag Now?

- **Glass:** 2.75 (1%)
- **HSW:** 2.65 (1%)
- **Metals:** 4.12 (2%)
- **Paper:** 7.93 (4%)
- **Packaging:** 16.89 (8%)
- **Plastics:** 24.21 (11%)
- **Other:** 38.46 (18%)
- **Organics:** 118.40 (55%)

Ever wonder exactly what the average resident we service throws away in their bags? Well we have sorted through hundreds of bags to be able tell you! This has many benefits as you'll see. The figures are in kilograms per household per year (kg/hh/yr), and the percentages are as a whole.

The Three Step Approach

The Association takes great care in deciding what materials can be accepted in its recycling program in order to meet its commitment to member municipalities that everything collected will be recycled. As such, we use a **three step approach** in determining material acceptability.

For one, **unless the "new" material has three solid established markets within reach it will not be considered.** We do this to ensure that we will have a sustainable long term market in place in order to be able to guarantee you that all recyclables collected at curbside will be recycled.

Secondly, **it has to make economic sense to collect, process and ship the material.** We have a fiduciary duty to the taxpayer to keep waste management cost affordable. Unless you believe that recent fuel increases are no big deal because you can afford them, we like to keep the recycling costs to a minimum.

Lastly, **we want to make sure that recycling a material will make a significant impact on the environment** to justify the infrastructure and investment that will be required to handle the material differently than it is today. Often, we look to see if consumers have alternative choices available to them that could be used to avoid the material in the first place to determine the urgency and viability of adding the material.

With this approach we are able to objectively evaluate the potential materials available for diversion. We can add materials to the program ensuring they will be recycled while keeping costs affordable for the end user.

What's Next? Organics?

Items such as 'styrofoam' packaging, milk cartons, clam shell containers, and tetra pak juice boxes are often cited as materials missing from our program, but they make up less than 1% of the waste disposed and have limited or no markets available on top of having enormous costs associated with them.

In comparison, the results clearly show that organic materials (food etc.) make up the majority of the average garbage bag, with developing markets and a cost to manage set slightly higher than waste disposal. Therefore, it is more likely that our next major focus on waste reduction will be centered around what makes up 55% of the garbage bag instead of less than one percent for such items as tetra paks, milk cartons and styrofoam!