

Mandatory Recycling By-Law for Business and Institutional Waste

Ecology Ottawa is calling on city council to:

Introduce and enforce a mandatory recycling by-law for waste generated by businesses and institutions in Ottawa, including those in the construction and demolition sector. Such a by-law, known as a “mandatory source separation” by-law, would require all non-residential establishments to separate and arrange for the recycling of blue and black box recyclables, food scraps, and electronics, as well as designated construction materials such as wood, metals, concrete, asphalt, and gypsum.

Why we are calling on city council to take this action

Ottawa is facing a landfill crisis. The city has predicted that its two municipal landfills will be full in five to ten years. Two privately owned landfills in Ottawa that serve the industrial, commercial, and institutional (IC&I) sector are either seeking approval for or contemplating expansion. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of recyclables are dumped in those landfills every year.¹ Some of this waste, such as computers, cell phones, and other electronics, contains toxic substances that threaten to contaminate our soil and water.

The vast majority of Ottawa’s waste—60 to 70 percent—is produced by businesses and institutions, and less than 20 percent of this waste is recycled.² The city is currently developing a strategy to deal with this problem, and a mandatory source separation by-law is one of the options being considered. A report prepared last summer for the city estimates such a by-law would dramatically boost the proportion of non-residential waste being recycled, to more than 50 percent.³ There is, furthermore, broad support for mandatory recycling; more than 85 percent of small businesses recently surveyed on the issue said that they would fully or partially support mandatory recycling of paper, cans, glass, plastic, and

construction and demolition waste.⁴

Such a by-law would extend the life of our landfills, prevent the waste of valuable recyclable materials, and protect our city’s soil and water from the toxic substances found in some of the waste that is currently being thrown out.

Mandatory recycling in other cities has boosted recycling rates and saved money

Mandatory recycling laws, applying to both residences and businesses, are common in many U.S. states and cities, and have been in place in two Canadian provinces for several years. PEI has required all businesses to recycle their waste since 2002; Nova Scotia has done the same since 1999.

Halifax now has a diversion rate of 60 percent for the industrial, commercial, and institutional sector, and 75 percent for the construction and demolition sector.⁵ As a whole, Nova Scotia’s internationally acclaimed waste management strategy saves people in the province about \$31 million annually.⁶

Some municipalities in Ontario, including Owen Sound and Chatsworth, have passed mandatory recycling by-laws that apply to the industrial, commercial, and institutional sector.

Many cities have also enacted landfill bans that prohibit recyclables and/or organics from entering landfills in their jurisdiction. The result is similar to that of a source separation by-law; businesses and institutions are required to recycle their waste. Vancouver, for example, has banned blue box recyclables, paper, electronic waste and other materials from its landfills; commercial and industrial operations now produce one-third of the region’s recycled waste.

2 See City of Ottawa backgrounder on IC&I Waste Diversion Strategy. http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/public_consult/ici/documents/background_en.html

3 Genivar et al.

4 City of Ottawa. “Report on Consultation – Executive Summary.” January 2008. http://ottawa.ca/residents/public_consult/ici/documents/consultation_summary_en.html

5 Boddy, Sharon. “A Culture of Conservation.” Forum. September/October 2007. p. 24

6 GPI Atlantic. “The Nova Scotia GPI Solid Waste-Resource Accounts.” July 2004. http://gpiatlantic.org/releases/pr_solidwaste.htm

1 Institutional, commercial, and industrial establishments recycle about 100,000 tonnes of waste each year, whereas they could be recycling up to 315,000 tonnes, according to Genivar, Kelleher Environmental, and Jacques Whitford. “IC&I and C&D Management Options Report.” July 6, 2007. http://ottawa.ca/residents/public_consult/ici/documents/task3_summary_en.html

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For more information, see:

Facts and statistics about the waste produced in Ottawa: www.ottawa.ca/city_services/recycling_garbage/facts_en.html

A City of Ottawa backgrounder on the problem of non-residential waste: www.ottawa.ca/residents/public_consult/ici/documents/backgrounder_en.html

An article about Seattle's mandatory recycling ordinance: http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/262968_nsecondary15.html

What you can do:

Write to your councillor and the mayor to tell them that you want a mandatory recycling by-law for businesses in the city. You can find your councillor's contact information at www.ottawa.ca/city_hall/mayor_council/councillors/index_en.html, or by calling 311.

There are also many simple things that you can do in your own life to reduce the waste being sent to Ottawa's landfills; for a few ideas, see www.ottawa.ca/city_services/recycling_garbage/tips_en.html.

Get involved with Ecology Ottawa, and help make Ottawa a more sustainable city. You can:

Sign up for our e-mail updates at www.ecologyottawa.ca/take-action/sign-on/get-updates.php. We will send no more than two updates a month, with information on local events and actions you can take to help protect Ottawa's environment.

Check out our calendar of events at www.ecologyottawa.ca/calendar, to stay informed of the many opportunities to get engaged on environmental issues throughout the city.

Volunteer your time with Ecology Ottawa. To find out more, send an email to volunteer@ecologyottawa.ca, or call 613-850-9101.

Make a donation. Ecology Ottawa is a legally registered, not-for-profit organization that relies on the financial support of people like you. Please make cheques out to Ecology Ottawa, and send to:

Ecology Ottawa, 298 Dalhousie Street, Box 52002
Ottawa, ON K1N 7E0

About Ecology Ottawa:

We are a not-for-profit organization working to make Ottawa the green capital of Canada. We believe that Ottawa residents are concerned about issues such as pollution, waste, and global warming, and that they want sustainable communities where public transit, renewable energy, recycling, and green space protection take priority. We are working with residents, communities, and local organizations to ensure that their voices are heard at city hall. Together we can make a difference, but we need your active support to move our city in the right direction.



Ecology Ottawa gratefully acknowledges the support of

