



Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing



Association of Municipalities of Ontario

ONTARIO CENTRE FOR MUNICIPAL BEST PRACTICES

Best Practice Summary Report

SW – WD – 04 – 01

Solid Waste – Waste Diversion – Bag Limits

June 2004

Practice Identification: Solid Waste Diversion – Bag limits

Case Study Municipality: City of Peterborough

Key Word: Management
Operational Policies

Benefits Derived from the Implementation of the Practice

- High diversion rates
- Reduced collection costs
- Minimal administration
- Increased awareness

Description of Practice in the Case Study Municipality

In keeping with its ongoing efforts to minimize the amount of material going to landfill and promote diversion programs, the City of Peterborough instituted a waste management policy to limit the number of garbage bags and/or containers set out for collection. The program limited garbage disposal to two bags of garbage per household per week. Both garbage and recycling collection is carried out weekly.

The bag limit policy has been phased in since 1990. In 1990, residents were limited to six bags of garbage, then four bags in 1991, three bags in 1994 and finally two bags of garbage in 1995, which remains the limit to date. There is no option to place out more bags but residents can take additional garbage to the landfill. Residents are charged \$5.00 to dispose of waste at the landfill. Residents with medical conditions that cannot meet the bag limit can apply to the City for an

exemption. Over the period since 1990, the City has steadily lowered its waste generation rate and more than doubled the diversion of waste to 50%.

At the time the bag limits were implemented, the City also made strides to increase the options for waste diversion available to the public. The City also has in place a mandatory recycling by-law. City staff cited consistency and program integrity as important elements to the success of this initiative. There was no evidence of increased incidents of illegal dumping in comparison to the period before the bag limits.

The City of Peterborough has a population 74,289 and is a single-tier community. The waste collection service area is 100% urban and consists of approximately 74% single family and 26% multi-family dwellings. In 2002, the City collected 28,778 tonnes of waste of which 13,178 tonnes were diverted from landfill through blue box and organic collection programs resulting in a 46% diversion rate.

Evaluation of the Practice

Efficiency

Based on the 2002 MPMP results, the City of Peterborough has a lower than average operating cost per tonne for waste diversion programs among municipalities in the 25,001 to 99,999 population class. The City experienced a 20% decrease in combined total recycling and garbage collection costs after the implementation of the two-bag limit.

The bag limit program is efficient to administer and has not increased administration costs. Garbage collection staff simply tag and leave behind bags over the limit therefore, requiring no increase in staff complement to administer the program. Extra media coverage was obtained when the bag limits were introduced. Otherwise, no additional advertising is done other than the City's regular communication initiatives that include newspaper ads for holiday and event schedules, information in the City's bi-yearly waste management newsletter (the "EnviroTimes"), and the distribution of an annual Waste Reduction and Conservation Calendar to City households.

Effectiveness

The implementation of the two-bag limit has demonstrated its effectiveness to decrease waste generation and motivate increased waste diversion. When compared to the year prior to the implementation of the two bag limit, waste generation decreased by 9%. The City of Peterborough credits the bag limit, in conjunction with the supporting waste diversion programs, for the City's high diversion rate, which is approaching 50%.

Bag limits appear to be an effective motivator to increase diversion, as they force households to recycle in order to meet requirements and to think about their waste

management practice. This initiative is easy to administer, requiring little if any supervision.

Legislative Initiatives

With the announcement by the Ontario Ministry of Environment to achieve 60% waste diversion and the creation of WDO, municipalities will be expected to achieve higher diversion rates through effective and efficient municipal programs. Implementation of bag limits can contribute to attaining this goal.

Replication of the Practice

Bag limits of three or fewer bags per week were found in fourteen of the sixteen better-performing municipalities interviewed. There are no limiting factors that would preclude any municipality from implementing this practice. Examples of other municipalities that have adopted bag limits of three bags or fewer include Northumberland, Peel, Niagara, Brockville, North Glengarry, Orangeville and Petawawa.

Some studies have shown the benefits of introducing bag limits. One such report is: *The Waste Diversion Impacts of Bag Limits and PAYT (Pay-As-You-Throw) Systems in North America*, April 2001, City of Toronto, Policy & Planning, Works & Emergency Services Department. That report states that bag limits make householders more aware of and more personally responsible for the amount of waste they are generating; they encourage participation in other available waste diversion initiatives; and they reduce waste management costs by diverting waste from disposal in landfills to recycling or composting options.

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