

Plastic Shopping Bags and Recycling

- The Canadian plastics industry was the first in the world to work with governments to implement curbside recycling of plastic shopping bags. The first city to implement curbside recycling of bags was Peterborough, Ontario in 1991.
- Plastic shopping bags can be recycled into new bags and other durable products such as plastic lumber for decks, park benches, picnic tables and waste receptacles. Whole new product categories are emerging using recycled plastic shopping bags such as the composite lumber market.
- Plastic shopping bags are increasingly being recognized as a valuable resource that should be recaptured through recycling.
- In Canada, 44 per cent of the population (almost 14 million people) has access to plastic bag recycling through municipal curbside and drop-off programs. (Reference: A Status Report on the Level of Recycling Access for Residentially Generated Plastics in Canada 2003 -2004, January 2005)
- Access to curbside recycling of plastic bags however varies by province.

BC	36%
Alta	56%
Sask	3%
Man	0%
Ont	50%
Que	41%
NS	100%
NB	58%
Nfld	0%
PEI	100%

- There are viable markets for plastic shopping bags. World demand for woodfibre-plastic composite products will reach \$1.4 billion U.S. by 2007, and will grow at an annual rate of 14 per cent through the remainder of the decade (report by international consulting firm Principia Partners).
- The number of plastic recycling businesses has nearly tripled over the past several years with more than 1,700 handling and reclaiming post-consumer plastics. (Source: Association of Post-Consumer Recyclers)

- Some Canadian municipalities have been successful with their bag-recycling programs including Peterborough, Montreal, Hamilton, Gabriola Island, Halifax and Belleville.
 - All households in Peterborough, Ontario, the first municipality in Canada to recycle plastic shopping bags, can recycle plastic shopping bags and film
 - In Montreal, plastic shopping bags are collected in 27 boroughs, or about 850,000 households
 - In Hamilton, Ontario, the plastic shopping bag collection program is available to more than 150,000 housing units

- Many Canadian supermarket chains – such as Dominion and A & P stores in Ontario, Overwaitea and Safeway stores in Western Canada, and Sobeys stores in the Atlantic provinces – have in-store bag collection programs. For instance, in British Columbia, around 50 per cent of the population can take plastic bags back to retail for recycling.

- It should be pointed out that preliminary waste audits have found that over 50 per cent of shopping bags are either reused or recycled and we will continue to encourage the reuse and recycling of plastic bags.

- There's no question that as a society, we can do a better job of recycling. The recycling of plastic shopping bags is a relatively new phenomenon, and it takes time to develop the marketplace and increase recycling rates.

- Plastic shopping bags collected curbside from the household are often contaminated which makes them harder to recycle. Therefore there is a need to inform/educate consumers on how to prepare plastic shopping bags for recycling

- That is why CPIA is working hard to improve recycling rates by:
 - providing resources to retailers to help them implement in-store collection ...providing information and best practices guides, as well as featuring examples of retailers implementing in-store collection programs (Reference: EPIC website, www.plastics.ca/epic)
 - providing public education materials and ads that municipalities can use to inform and educate their residents about proper plastic bag recycling (Reference: EPIC website, www.plastics.ca/epic)
 - offering a free online database that matches buyers and sellers of recycled plastics