



DIVERTING COMPOSTABLE ORGANICS

INTRODUCTION

Compostable organics are biodegradable materials such as grass clippings, yard waste, food scraps, paper, textiles, wood, and even sewage sludge. Compost can be sustainably managed through curbside collection programs, in a residential backyard composter or at a commercial organics processing facility.

Utilizing sustainable waste management practices, compostable organics can be a renewable resource and an effective means of waste reduction. Despite these potential benefits, one third of the garbage in landfills across the province is organic material that could have been composted and used to enhance the environment. With innovative diversion strategies in place, we could potentially divert 361,000 tonnes of organic material annually in the Lower Mainland alone. Organics diversion programs, therefore, play a vital role in moving the province towards zero waste.

CURRENT STATUS

BC does not have a province-wide strategy for compostable organics. Policies for managing these materials, if they exist at all, are set at the municipal or regional district level. The result is a patchwork of organics management practices throughout the province. In some cases, an emphasis on implementing effective organic waste management programs has proved to be quite successful. In other jurisdictions, a movement towards these strategies has yet to be explored.

On Vancouver Island, Ladysmith became the first municipality in the province to provide curbside collection for organics in 2006. As of 2013, a growing number of municipalities in the area have put similar programs in place including Victoria, Duncan, North Cowichan, View Royal, Parksville, Lantzville, Qualicum Beach and Nanaimo. In Metro Vancouver, most municipalities have followed suit and are now collecting organic waste at curbside for single family households as well. This Metro Vancouver “Green Bin Program” has a goal of diverting the 100,000 tonnes of compostable organics disposed annually at curbside by single family households in the region. Communities with compostable organics collection have diverted an additional 25-30 percent of their waste.

The Province of Nova Scotia provides an outstanding example of regulatory leadership and demonstrates the potential success of organics programs. With a landfill organics ban in place since 1998 and a long-running curbside organics collection program, 94% of Nova Scotia households participate in the composting of organic materials. As a result, Nova Scotia ranks number one in Canada with the highest per capita diversion of organic material. With thoughtful planning and a strong commitment to waste diversion, organics programs in B.C. can have similar long-term success as well.

Overall, curbside organics programs for single family dwellings have had tremendous success thus far. Additionally, an organics disposal ban beginning in 2005 in the Regional District of Nanaimo has led to a 64% total diversion rate. The ban has resulted in an annual reduction of 3,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. However, programs for multi-family unit households, commercial buildings, industries and public institutions have ample room for improvement. Home to two-thirds of the province's residents, these sectors within Metro Vancouver produce 70% of the region's organic waste and highlight an area of waste diversion opportunities for the province.

EMERGING INITIATIVES

Strategies are being implemented across the province to divert compostable organics from landfills. Beginning in 2015, food and other organic waste in both the Capital Regional District (CRD) and Metro Vancouver will be banned from the landfill, potentially diverting an additional 265,000 tonnes of waste each year. Affecting commercial buildings, single family households and institutions, the Metro Vancouver Organics Disposal Ban will apply to all municipalities across the region. Similarly, the CRD intends to implement a kitchen scraps strategy which restricts compostable organics from the garbage and aims to eliminate 30% of the waste stream at the Hartland Landfill. Both strategies include a phased incentive and surcharge plan to allow for businesses and residents to familiarize themselves with the new restrictions.

With Metro Vancouver, the Capital Regional District and the Regional District of Nanaimo adopting similar organic material bans, approximately 64.3 percent of British Columbians will be responsibly disposing of compostable organics.

COMPOSTING INSTEAD OF LANDFILLING

What's wrong with putting organics into landfills? Landfilled organic waste— especially food waste – contributes directly to global warming as the methane generated by rotting organics in landfills is a greenhouse gas 21 times more potent than CO₂ (i.e. vehicle exhaust). As well, the moist content of organics contributes greatly to the creation of leachate, a management problem for landfills and a threat to ground and surface water quality.

By landfilling organic material, the functionality of compost material is lost and no one is able to benefit from the potential economic and environmental benefits. Food scraps return nutrients to the soil to improve soil health and reduce the need for chemicals and fertilizer. A composting facility can utilize food scraps and transform them to high-quality compost which is sold to local landscapers and farmers. They can also be transported to a facility that captures methane and turns it into energy or processes it into biofuel. On top of these potential benefits, recycling organics separately creates employment opportunity in program development, education, collection, processing and marketing. Composted organics are a valuable resource that can return nutrients to the earth.

COMPOSTING INSTEAD OF GARBURATORS

Disposing of food waste in a garburator uses excess water, electricity and adds problem materials such as suspended solids, oils and grease to wastewater treatment plants. It also increases levels of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), and Chemical Oxygen Demand (COD), using up the available oxygen in water, resulting in oxygen levels that are too low to support aquatic life. In the opinion of Metro Vancouver, garburators are not considered a sustainable way to manage organic waste. Due to the additional pressure that they put on wastewater treatment facilities and the insufficient use of clean water, it is not considered an effective solution for waste diversion challenges.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT ORGANICS

Composting is one of the methods that individuals can use to make a difference. If your municipality is a participant in a Green Bin Program and you receive curbside organics collection, be sure to diligently separate your materials and do your part to reduce waste.

As we approach the inception of the Capital Regional District and Metro Vancouver disposal bans, business owners and building managers can begin to consider implementing an organics collection program. Speak with your current garbage or recycling hauler about offering an organic collection service as a first step. If you are a business or apartment which currently does not have a private disposal contractor, contact your municipality or an organics hauler and you can arrange for these services.

Alternatively, if your community is without curbside organics collection and an organic waste reduction strategy, individuals can influence how their communities manage waste. You can write to municipal staff and elected officials in your area and voice your concerns regarding organics management. You can also join with others to share information and put forward a strong, united position on issues. Consumers, retailers, environmentalists, governments, producers and recyclers are all represented and have a voice within RCBC. Since its inception 40 years ago, the Council has worked to address our complex environmental issues by working together with all parties. By providing the diverse groups concerned with waste reduction issues with a constructive and cooperative forum for discussion, RCBC helps develop solutions for tomorrow that make sense today. The best way to ensure you keep up with the latest developments in organics diversion and have your voice heard is to join RCBC. By doing so, you will receive the latest RCBC publications that explore this and other issues. As an RCBC member you become part of the made-in-B.C. solution that fits our collective waste reduction objectives and serves as a model for others to follow.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Ministry of Environment: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/epd/codes/omr/>

Metro Vancouver Composting: <http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/solidwaste/Residents/composting>

Metro Van Organics Ban Bylaw: <http://former.vancouver.ca/blStorage/11092.PDF>

Regional District of Nanaimo Organics Diversion: <http://www.rdn.bc.ca/cms.asp?wpID=1068>

Model Organics Strategies: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=7E592D515C5240CCA7D48A426DE023C2>

RCBC Residential Organics Collection Report: http://www.rcbc.ca/files/u7/policy091001_owgreportresidential.pdf

RCBC Multi-Family Food Scraps Collection Report: http://www.rcbc.ca/files/u7/policy_110207_mforganicsreport.pdf

For questions or additional information on composting, and other waste reduction initiatives, contact the RCBC Recycling Hotline at 604-732-9253 or toll free at 1-800-667-4321; or visit our website at www.rcbc.ca.

RCBC Mission Statement: The Recycling Council of BC facilitates the exchange of ideas and knowledge that enable efficient solutions to eliminate waste.

*Unit 10-119 West Pender Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 1S5
Phone: 604-683-6009 Fax: 604-683-7255 Web: www.rcbc.ca*