



YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE... REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

How the “Blue Box” Began

+ Insights for Creating Change

By Eric Hellman
September 2021

Many people have asked over the years, “What made the Blue Box so successful?” On the 40th anniversary of its launch, and as someone who helped create it, I’d like to share the story of how it got started, what contributed to its success, and what we might learn from it —about how to create more positive change in our world.

Introduction

Before the Blue Box began in September 1981, many other curbside collection programs existed across Canada and the United States. Some handled only newspapers, while others collected cans and glass as well. A few even used specialized collection containers to improve participation. So why did the “blue box” become the model for recycling programs across Ontario, Canada and up to 150 countries (according to Stewardship Ontario[1]), and even a symbol for recycling itself?

For me, its success was more than just about a colourful container, a catchy marketing slogan, or a well-designed collection program. It was the outcome of some significant shifts in thinking and values; a desire to ‘empower’ people rather than convince or pressure them to take part; and an unusual collaboration among business, non-profits and government – all of which led to what it has become today.

In the Beginning

The two men who can truly be called the “fathers of the Blue Box” were Jack McGinnis and Nyle Ludolph.

Founder of a non-profit group called the Is Five Foundation, Jack McGinnis was passionate about educating and empowering people on the environment. He was also committed to recycling. Motivated by these desires, and using his own pick-up truck, he began collecting recyclable materials from households in the Beaches area of Toronto in 1974.

Using this experience of ‘what worked,’ Is Five then launched a multi-material curbside collection in the Borough of East York (now part of the City of Toronto). Jack hired Derek Stephenson to work on it. And as their expertise grew, the two men decided to create Resource Integration Systems (RIS) Limited, to develop recycling on a more professional basis. RIS was then hired to create a multi-material program at Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Borden, Ontario – where they used different coloured plastic milk crates for the collection of materials, and further tested their ideas about how to make recycling work.

Nyle Ludolph came from a very different background. As Manager of Collections for Superior Sanitation, the garbage contractor for the City of Kitchener, Nyle had operated curbside newspaper collections for the company, and actively supported local non-profit recycling drives and depots during the 1970s.

As fate or fortune would have it, I was given the opportunity to connect these three men – and help them launch the world’s first “blue box” program.

Why Did It Start in Kitchener, Canada?

As a student at the University of Toronto in 1973, I volunteered at the local office of Pollution Probe, one of the first environmental groups in the country. There I met Peter Love, director of Probe’s Garbage Team, who introduced me to the “three Rs” of waste: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle.

Peter also shared another idea, one of the most powerful I’ve ever come across: the **power of a choice**. It was the idea that every person could do something about garbage by making one fundamental decision: “Do I want to throw this item out? Or do I want to reduce, reuse or

recycle it?” The first of these choices leads to many *negative* consequences, such as the pollution caused by burying or burning it and the waste of resources and energy; while the latter creates a series of *beneficial* impacts, such as saving resources, improving the environment and creating jobs.

Three years later, as an Environmental Studies student at the University of Waterloo, I started a group called Garbage Probe (an offshoot of the local Pollution Probe office). For the next several years, I actively promoted waste recycling and reduction across the twin cities of Kitchener and Waterloo. And it was during this time that I met Nyle Ludolph. While working together on the occasional project and exploring ways to expand recycling in the region, he and I became good friends.

(Many years later, Nyle confided that he actually thought I was a bit weird back then, talking about the 3Rs as passionately as I did. Yet I never experienced this while we were together. Nyle Ludolph was one of the friendliest and kindest people I ever remember working with.)

At the time, Garbage Probe was also a member of the Ontario Garbage Coalition – a provincial network of people involved in reducing waste, growing recycling and opposing landfills. For the Coalition’s annual conference in 1977, I organized and hosted an event called Garbagefest ‘77 (named after the Oktoberfest beer celebrations in Waterloo Region). Nyle and Jack McGinnis were both speakers at the event. And it later turned out that Nyle was very impressed as he listened to Jack talk about his East York and Beaches recycling programs...

‘Are You Serious?’

Fast forward several years to early 1980. Now living in Toronto, I had become co-founder and Executive Director of the Recycling Council of Ontario. I was also working with Jack and Derek at RIS Limited.

One winter’s day, Nyle and I unexpectedly met over lunch at a solid waste management conference. And somewhere between dinner rolls and dessert, he told me a surprising story – about how he and his family had been separating recyclable materials from their garbage and collecting them in their garage, since the previous summer. Astounded by how much they had collected, Nyle then uttered these words: “Wouldn’t it be great if we could do this city-wide?”

I could barely believe my ears. Here I was, a recycling consultant, listening to a garbage collection manager tell me he’d like to start a recycling program. Trying hard to hold down my excitement, I turned to him and said, “If you are serious, I’ll send you a proposal!” He assured me he was. So later that day, I returned to my office and drafted a \$50,000 proposal for a demonstration program in the City of Kitchener.

Working with Jack and Derek to refine it, we designed a six-month project to test the effectiveness of multi-material curbside collection in a small area of the city. The program would include a major educational campaign, as well as several different collection options, both with-and-without the use of a household container. Expanding the proposal to \$72,000, to allow for more waste research, public education and waste reduction initiatives, RIS then submitted it to Nyle. He liked what he saw, and asked me to come to Kitchener and meet with Ron Murray, President of Superior Sanitation, to sell him on it.

I had strong feelings of fear and trepidation as I drove to Kitchener that day. Despite Nyle’s enthusiasm, I really wondered whether the President of a *garbage* company (and a former banker) would decide to pay for such a recycling program. However, Ron Murray threw me a curve in our meeting. To paraphrase his words, he said, “We make a lot of money from garbage. But I’ve never thought that that made a lot of sense – for a city to spend all this money on something that essentially has no value.” Ron thought that making money from recycling would make a whole lot more sense. And he gave me his *tentative* go-ahead.

Final approval, however, rested on one key issue. Superior’s garbage collection contract with the City of Kitchener was scheduled to end soon. They would ask the City to extend the contract, so Superior could implement the test program. And if staff and Council agreed, we would get permission to proceed.

‘We Don’t Believe People will Recycle’

It’s important to step back for a moment and consider the state of recycling in 1981. Across Ontario, there were only a few dozen local recycling programs. Most were drop-off depots for glass, metal and newspapers, with some curbside newspaper collections as well. Programs continually grew, then declined, because of unstable markets for recyclable materials. And this was part of a systemic ‘cycle of problems’ holding back recycling as a whole. It had four parts:

- 1) Manufacturers didn’t believe it was possible to get a steady stream of good quality recyclable materials from municipalities and the public. As a result, they didn’t invest in large scale recycling plants, and only paid good prices when they needed to supplement their supplies of virgin materials.
- 2) Without steady markets, cities and collection companies weren’t assured of sustainable revenues for recyclable materials. Thus programs started and stopped as market prices rose and fell. As a result, most recycling collections were operated by non-profit, community groups.
- 3) Higher-level governments didn’t believe that most people would actively participate in curbside programs. Why? Only about 5% were using local depots, while 80-90% said in public opinion surveys that they wanted to participate. Governments interpreted this as ‘people aren’t telling the truth, or serious about recycling.’
- 4) Finally, the public believed that *government and industry* didn’t really care about recycling, because of the start-and-stop nature of municipal programs. This led to growing public frustration & resentment, and reduced participation when new programs started up.

In ecological terms, this cycle is called a ‘negative feedback loop’ – one in which each step negatively reinforces the next. And in this particular situation, everyone was waiting for *someone else* to change.

Seeing Things Differently

At Resource Integration Systems and the Recycling Council of Ontario, we interpreted the signs and surveys differently. As recyclers ourselves, we believed that most people DID want to

recycle – but weren’t doing so because local programs were neither convenient nor consistent. We further believed that we could break this ‘negative loop or cycle’ by:

- 1) *demonstrating to municipalities* and industry that people **would** participate in large numbers, if given better programs;
- 2) *growing public participation* through: (a) educating residents on the value of recycling and the importance of their actions, and (b) providing a convenient & sustainable collection program on which they could depend;
- 3) *showing industrial manufacturers* that municipalities **could** supply a dependable stream of recyclable materials that were worthy of good, stable prices; and
- 4) making collection programs *more financially viable* to operate.

At the time, we actually favoured a non-profit, community-based approach to recycling. In fact, many of us saw business as ‘the opposition.’ Most companies seemed more interested in making profits than keeping programs alive. They also tended to collect only the most profitable materials, rather than maximizing waste diversion from landfills and incineration.

However, with Superior Sanitation, our thinking shifted. Some of this was due to my past friendship with Nyle. But it also came from Ron Murray’s perspective on waste, and the company’s willingness to go beyond just profit – to create a program that would benefit the municipality, the public and the environment as well.

Getting the Green Light

As Ron had promised, Superior asked Kitchener for an extension on its garbage collection contract, contingent on launching the new recycling program. Nyle was given responsibility for presenting their request to a special meeting of City Council. And he asked me to present the recycling proposal, since I had both spearheaded it, and worked with Council on another project several years earlier.

Our hearts were ‘in our mouths’ that night, wondering whether this vision of recycling would interest Council enough to give Superior a multi-million dollar contract extension. And they were by no means wholly supportive. One alderman even asked, “Why Superior? Couldn’t other garbage collection companies do this just as well?”

Not quite sure what to say, I remember fumbling with the question. “Because other companies don’t believe in it, and Superior does,” I said, doing my best to explain. It seemed a bit simplistic at the time. Yet as I look back now, that actually was the key. Belief in and commitment to the project were *essential* to its success. Ron Murray and Nyle Ludolph both had that, while few others did. And this was what ultimately kept the project going during difficult times later on.

After some deliberation, Council finally agreed. The contract extension and test project were approved. And we were ecstatic.

Setting Out the Vision

In our agreement, RIS Ltd. had responsibility for project design, organization, communications and public education, while Superior – which had recently become part of Laidlaw Waste Management Inc. – would do the collection of recyclable materials through its new subsidiary, Total Recycling Systems. They would then work with Jack Rosen, a local pioneer in industrial waste recycling, to find markets for the materials collected.

We began by writing up our vision. Our goal wasn't just to create a successful program in Kitchener, however; it was to re-shape the entire future of municipal waste management in Canada. (*Yes, big thinkers...*) We wanted to show that a well-designed and stable program could become the model for successful programs anywhere.

After final approval from Ron and Nyle, our statement of intention was sent out to the city, provincial and federal governments, industry and the media, to give them a heads-up on what was to come.

(Note: This statement of intention can be read, in full, in the next four pages.)

Program Introduction Newsletter (for government, industry and the media)

A New Perspective On Waste...

A Program Designed to Shape the
Future of Municipal Waste Management
from Canada's Leader in Waste Management.

SUPERIOR
SANITATION SERVICES LTD.



TOTAL
RECYCLING SYSTEMS LTD.

In September, 1981, Superior Sanitation Services Ltd. and Total Recycling Systems Ltd. are launching a bold new initiative in solid waste management in Kitchener, Ontario. Beginning with a pilot area of approximately 1,000 homes, Total will commit significant resources over the next 6 months to develop and test a wide range of techniques for reducing, reusing, and recycling waste materials. The results of this pilot program will provide the basis for the development of a total waste reduction program for the City as a whole. The focus of this effort is nothing less than a total reformation of our approach to waste management.



Ron Murray, President
Superior Sanitation Services Ltd.

"Superior Sanitation and the waste collection industry have been built on serving the needs of our customers. With today's rising taxes and energy costs, these needs are changing. The Kitchener demonstration program reflects our commitment to the new needs of municipalities.

Over the past twenty years, Superior Sanitation has been a leading innovator in the waste management industry. In the years to come, our goal is to take the 'waste' out of waste management. I believe this waste prevention and recycling program is an important step toward reaching this goal."

What We Are Trying To Accomplish

By making people aware of the amount of waste they produce; by supporting existing community services which reclaim and reuse a wide variety of waste materials; and, through the implementation of a modern recycling program, it is our intention to reduce the amount of waste produced in the City of Kitchener to a minimum. This demonstration will help to develop practical mechanisms for implementing our three point philosophy on waste prevention:

- Reduce** Through effective education and motivational programs, individuals will be encouraged to consciously reduce the amount of waste they produce: by learning to recognize and avoid excessive wastes; through more efficient use of products and services in the home; and, by turning organic wastes into valuable compost.
- Reuse** Once around is not enough. We will help people to use many of their waste materials in new and productive ways or help them to get those materials to other people in the community who can make use of them.
- Recycle** Total Recycling Systems Ltd. will establish efficient, sustainable recycling systems to keep valuable resources out of the waste stream. Drawing upon the experiences of innovative recycling programs that have operated throughout North America, as well as from our own unique experiments, our goal is to develop Canada's most effective recovery program.



Morley Rosenberg
Mayor, Kitchener

"This demonstration program is a major opportunity for all of us. It's a chance for City officials to discover the potential of a unique approach to waste management. For residents, it's an opportunity to learn that they can do something to save money and keep municipal costs down. City Council has approved this new venture in recognition of the potential benefits to our community, and I support Superior Sanitation 100% in their efforts."

Benefits to Everyone

The development of viable new approaches to waste management holds considerable benefits for individuals and their community:

- Ultimately, the consumer must pay for all of the wastes that are produced, and then again to have this waste collected and disposed. A reduction in the amount of waste produced can lead directly to a reduction in waste management costs.
- Changing our waste habits is probably the most direct contribution an individual can make to protecting the environment.
- Successfully reducing the amount of waste produced helps to conserve finite resources, and recycling of waste materials can provide new sources of raw materials for Canadian industries – often at lower costs.
- Canada is a net importer of waste materials that could be recovered from our garbage and recycled. A reduction in foreign imports can directly improve our balance of trade and strengthen the Canadian economy.
- This new approach to waste can make a positive contribution by helping stimulate a climate of conservation in the home, with all the potential this entails for other resource and energy conservation needs. Conservation will be the watchword of the 80's and waste is one clear area where the individual can make the difference.

Kitchener and Beyond

Total Recycling Systems Ltd. is concentrating its efforts at this time on a single demonstration area in order to provide the opportunity for broad experimentation and to allow for feedback from participants. The successful components of this program will then be extended to the City of Kitchener as a whole, with the longer term objective of a complete change in our approach to municipal waste management operations throughout North America.



Nyle Ludolph, President
Total Recycling Systems Ltd.

"I believe in the value of recycling. The purpose of this demonstration is to show that recovering wastes makes financial sense for us and provides manufacturing industries with a secure, economical source of raw materials. At the same time, its a chance for people to learn that they really can make a difference in their environment. Everyone benefits."

Our efforts will not be restricted to the individual residential householder. This total waste reduction approach will be extended to a wide variety of waste generators, including:

- The development of appropriate recovery programs for apartment buildings.
- The recovery of waste materials from local industries.
- Waste reduction and materials recovery from commercial and retail operations.
- Recovery of waste paper from institutions such as City Hall.

An important component of the demonstration project will involve careful monitoring of the impacts of these initiatives on the waste stream; the economics of the program; and, the attitudes and willingness of individuals in the demonstration area to make these changes.

We Are Looking For Your Support and Involvement

A truly meaningful revolution in our approach to waste will, of course, require support from many quarters. To help us, we are actively seeking the support of industries which can utilize waste materials in their manufacturing processes; government agencies responsible for waste management; local media and community groups; and, other key leaders, to support the efforts of the citizens of Kitchener. Together, we have an opportunity to take a major step forward in the evolution of waste management in Canada.

This project is being undertaken by Superior Sanitation Services Ltd. and Total Recycling Systems Ltd. Both Superior and Total are subsidiaries of the Laidlaw Waste Management Group, Inc., Canada's largest waste management company.

To support us in this work, we have obtained the services of Resource Integration Systems Ltd., experts in the field of waste management and recycling.

Total Recycling Systems Ltd.: P.O. Box 10, Kitchener, Ont., N2G 3W9. Tel. 519-744-2221, ext. 259.

Resource Integration Systems Ltd.: 467 Richmond St. E., Toronto, Ont., M5A 1R1. Tel. 416-366-2578.

Designing the Program

As Coordinator for the demonstration program, my next step was working with the City Planning Department to find an appropriate test area. Since our goal was to create a foundation for future success – for both city-wide collection, and programs in other municipalities as well – we wanted a neighbourhood that was demographically representative of the city as a whole. The area chosen was the Central Ottawa St. section of Centre Ward, an area of just under 1100 homes. Once this was approved, I then met with the local Alderman, the president of the ratepayer association and other key people in the community, to tell them about our plans and invite their participation and support.

Jack and Derek worked with Nyle to design the collection program itself. Jack also had the task of finding a ‘collection box’ that would be suitable for in-home use. Most residents would be asked to use their own cardboard boxes or bags to set out materials at the curb. However, we wanted to see if a special container might increase participation. Jack eventually selected a corrugated plastic box (see below) for its low cost, ease of construction & distribution, and maximum durability. And the colour he chose was blue.

The question is often asked “Why blue?” While no definitive answer is known, several explanations have been given. One is that it seemed the most attractive colour and was thought easiest to see, by recycling collectors, during all months of the year. [2] A second explanation was shared recently by Wendy Cook (who was with the Ontario Waste Management Advisory Board in 1981.) She recalls that during the CFB Borden program, Jack McGinnis told her that red was used for hazardous material collection, and green was being kept for household organics. Therefore blue was the colour left for general recyclables. [3]

The First Blue Box



Public Education

Our next step was a meeting with Nyle Ludolph to discuss how we would communicate the program to the public. Rather than simply creating a ‘marketing slogan,’ our desire was to find something that spoke to people’s hearts and minds at a deeper level.

Standing by the Laidlaw/Superior works yard one day, we began talking about what recycling meant to us. Each one touched on a different reason: the ability to reduce waste, save materials, energy, taxes and so on. Jack said there were a lot of problems in the world – such as the decline of the whales and pollution in the Great Lakes (at the time) – which people felt they could do little or nothing about. Yet separating recyclable materials at home was one thing everyone could do to contribute to society. In the end, it was this last idea that we all shared: the belief that people could “*make a difference*” by reducing, reusing and recycling their waste.

This wasn’t a phrase we had heard from other programs. Rather, it was the language which surfaced that day to express what we believed, and felt that others would too. This was why “You can make a difference” became the foundational idea behind the test program – and our core message to residents and the City as a whole.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . . REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

(From the masthead of our newsletters)

RIS felt strongly that ongoing education and communications were essential to the program’s success. We wanted to involve residents, hear their ideas + feedback, and give them reasons to participate. But instead of trying to *convince* people to recycle, we took the opposite approach. We believed that if they received useful information about WHY recycling makes a difference and HOW to do it, most would *willingly* take part.

Since the program was in only a small part of Kitchener, mass advertising could not be used. We therefore chose to create high quality newsletters, which were then hand delivered to each house in the test area. The first one, in early August, announced what was coming, with statements of support from the Mayor and the local alderman. The second, to be delivered shortly before program start-up, gave residents information on how to prepare materials. It also provided practical reasons about why their participation and recycling mattered. (This included as reducing landfill, saving resources & energy, and creating jobs).

(These two newsletters can be found on the following pages.)

First Announcement Newsletter for Residents (prior to start-up)

Beginning September 17th . . .

Superior Sanitation to Launch New Concept in Waste Management

Superior Sanitation Services Ltd. has provided efficient, reliable garbage collection to the people of Kitchener for over twenty years. During this time we have collected and taken literally millions of tons of garbage, containing potentially valuable resources, to the regional landfill site. An outgrowth of our post-war "throw-away" lifestyle, this approach to waste management has become common practice throughout North America. But the realities of the 1980's – the energy crisis, soaring inflation, rapidly diminishing resources, and the environmental costs associated with waste disposal – now combine to make this approach to garbage too costly and increasingly unacceptable. We would like to ask for your support and co-operation in developing a new direction for waste management in the City of Kitchener.



The City of Kitchener generates almost 32,000 lbs. of solid waste each hour and most of this ends up in landfill sites like this. It doesn't have to be this way.

— Reduce Reuse Recycle —



Your home is located in the pilot area shown on this map. This area has been chosen as the starting point for a total approach to reducing Kitchener's garbage. To help you in this effort, we will be providing you with regular information on how you can reduce waste in your home. We will also show you how to reuse materials in the home so they won't become garbage, or how to get these materials to people who can reuse them. And, starting Thursday, September 17th, we will also be asking you to separate out your newspapers, glass bottles, tin cans and other paper products so these can be recycled.

More details of this program will be sent to you next week.

**YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE:
REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE**





"This demonstration program is a major opportunity for all of us. It's a chance for City officials to discover the potential of a unique approach to waste management. For residents, it's an opportunity to learn that they can do something to save money and keep municipal costs down. City Council has approved this new venture in recognition of the potential benefits to our community, and I support Superior Sanitation 100% in their efforts."

Morley Rosenberg, Mayor, Kitchener

"In an era of increasing awareness of limited resources it is exciting to see this reduce, reuse recycle program being initiated in the City of Kitchener. As the alderman for Centre Ward, in which the test program is being conducted, I strongly urge each of you to participate as fully as possible in this innovative, new venture in waste management.



Richard Christy, Alderman

Benefits To Everyone

The ability to reduce the amount of waste we produce holds many practical benefits for everyone:

- Ultimately, the consumer pays for all of the products, packaging and waste materials produced, and then must pay again to have these wastes collected and disposed of. By reducing the amount of waste we produce, we can save money directly and reduce municipal waste management costs.
- Changing our own waste habits is one of the most significant positive contributions that an individual can make to protecting the environment.
- By reducing wastes and recycling waste materials we are helping to conserve finite material and energy resources, and providing new sources of raw materials to Canadian industries.
- Each year, Canada imports hundreds of millions of dollars worth of waste materials that could be recovered from our garbage and recycled. A reduction in foreign imports can directly improve our balance of trade, help to create jobs in Canada, and strengthen the Canadian economy.

You Can Make a Difference: Reduce Reuse Recycle

This is not just another empty slogan. The success of this program is absolutely dependent upon the willingness of individuals like yourselves to take the solution to one of today's major problems into your own hands. Your support really does make an important difference. Over the next several weeks you will be receiving much more information about this program. If you do have other questions, or better yet,

suggestions or new ideas on how we can help to reduce waste, feel free to call or write:

Nyle Ludolph,
 General Manager
 Total Recycling Systems Ltd.
 P.O. Box 10
 Kitchener, Ont.
 W2G 3W9
 Tel. 744-3367 ext. 259

Second Announcement Newsletter (just prior to start-up)

THE TOTAL NEWS

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . . REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE.

NEW RECYCLING PROGRAM COMES TO KITCHENER

Thursday, September 17th, will be the first collection day for the new recycling program in your area of Kitchener. While your non-recyclable garbage will still be collected each week, as before, from now on there will also be another pick-up each Thursday of materials for recycling — newspapers, glass, metal, and other paper products.

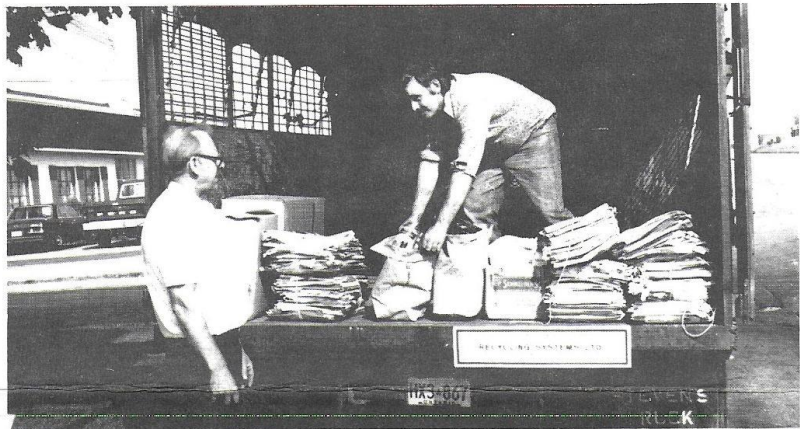
These four types of materials should be separated from your regular garbage, prepared as outlined below, and placed at the curbside at least several feet away from your garbage. A separate truck operated by Total Recycling Systems Ltd., a subsidiary of Superior Sanitation Services Ltd., will collect this separate waste and process it for recycling. This program will result in positive benefits for Kitchener, including the conservation of energy and raw materials and a reduction in the total amount of waste that has to be disposed of at our landfill site.

Materials should be prepared as follows:

Newspapers: Anything that comes with your paper, including inserts, should be stacked and tied into bundles using some type of sturdy string or twine.

Glass: Bottles and jars should have any metal removed (lids, foil labels, metal rings) and should be rinsed if they still contain any food residue. Paper labels do not have to be removed.

Metal: Tin cans should be rinsed, have paper labels removed, and should be flattened. Pop cans (with aluminum pull-top ends) should be



Nyle Ludolph, General Manager of Total Recycling Systems Ltd., is working with Collection Supervisor Bill Kirkham to prepare for the September 17th launch of the company's exciting new recycling program. During the pilot phase the recycling program will serve more than 1,000 homes in the Central Ottawa St. area.

left in your regular garbage, since they cannot easily be recycled with normal tin-steel food cans.

Other Paper: A number of other waste paper materials can be separated for recycling, as long as they are not contaminated with plastic or other non-recyclable materials. You should include: old corrugated cardboard boxes; flattened food, soap, or shoe boxes (making sure that only the paper is included); brown 'grocery' bags; and, old letter paper, mail, and similar 'office' type paper. You should not include: paperback and other books, magazines, telephone books, and any non-paper material.

Past experience in other communities has shown that it takes only a few minutes each week for a family

to separate recyclable material for collection. Your support and co-operation are critical to the success of this program. In particular, your help in minimizing any non-recyclable contamination will ensure that all the materials collected from your street can indeed be recycled. The inclusion of non-recyclable materials can lead to an entire batch being rejected and sent to the landfill site.

The recycling collection has been planned for the same day as your regular garbage collection in order to make the program more convenient. This does lead to some possible problems, particularly the chance that the two collection trucks will not be sure which material is for recycling and which is supposed to go to the landfill.

See 'Recycling . . .' Pg. 2

WHY BOTHER TO PARTICIPATE?

Inflation. Unemployment. Energy shortages. Pollution. For many of us these words can spark feelings of frustration. It sometimes seems as though there is nothing we can actually do to deal with these local, national, and global problems.

One purpose of this newsletter is to convince you that *you can make a difference!* We would like you to see your involvement in this new recycling, and other actions you and your family can take to reduce waste, as important and necessary steps in dealing with these larger problems.

There are rarely any magical or easy solutions to problems such as energy shortages and pollution. Our success in Kitchener and in Canada in dealing with these problems will come, to a large extent, from the actions that each of us take as individuals. The decisions that each of us make in our homes day by day become part of the total societal action that dictates whether we encounter energy shortages or a more polluted environment.

This new recycling program, and the related reduction and reuse activities, provide us each with an opportunity to take immediate, positive and meaningful steps that really will contribute to the solutions we all want. Consider the following:

1. The cost of living

- each of us spends an average of over \$140 a year on the packaging which comes with the products we buy. Then we throw it away. Over 32% of municipal waste is packaging.
- collection and disposal of Kitchener's garbage costs over \$946,000 a year, or \$7.78 per person. While that's lower than for many Ontario cities, it's still a significant cost. We pay for it in our municipal taxes.

2. Resources

- You and your neighbours (in the area shown on the map – pg.0) could save over 7,000 trees a year by recycling the

paper products you normally throw away.

3. Energy

- The recycling of materials from a Kitchener-wide collection could save more than 26,000 barrels of oil per year; that's equivalent to 23 gallons of gasoline for every household in Kitchener! Composting and waste prevention would conserve even more energy in activities such as waste collection and disposal, product manufacturing and transportation, and virgin resource extraction (eg. mining/forestry).

4. Pollution

- When you throw away less garbage, there's less litter and pollution – it's as simple as that. What's more, industries produce less air, water and land pollution when they make new products from your 'waste' resources instead of virgin materials (eg. trees). Together we can improve our environment.

5. Jobs/The Economy

- When we treat our wastes as resources, we can create new jobs and improve the economy.

Right now, Ontario and other Canadian industries import millions of dollars worth of wastes from other countries because they can't get enough from people here. So when you recycle, we all save.

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. These 3 words are the keys to a new future for waste. Each one offers a variety of practical ways to reach the objectives discussed above.

Right now, much of this newsletter and the other information you have received from us have emphasized the weekly recycling program and the importance of your family's involvement. Over the next several months we will be talking more about some of the reduction and reuse alternatives that can lead to further practical benefits in your home and in Kitchener as a whole.



RECYCLING... Continued

We therefore ask that you place your recyclables apart from your regular garbage bags or cans at the curbside, and that you try and use some type of used open container for recycling so that the collection truck can easily see which material is for recycling. We suggest that newspapers simply be bundled, rather than put into a bag or box, since they will then be highly visible. Your glass, metal and other paper can be put easily into open brown or plastic bags, or an open cardboard box. Brown bags are better than plastic, since they can also be recycled.

If you want the crew to leave

your box or some other container that you use on your lawn, so that you can use it again, we ask that you use a crayon or other marker to indicate: "Recycling – Please Leave".

Your recycling collection will always be on the same day as your garbage collection. If garbage pick-up shifts to another day, such as Friday, due to a holiday then your recycling collection will also shift.

Once again, your support and co-operation are critical to the success of this program. You *can* make a difference. If you have any questions, please call the Total Recycling office for further information.



"Recycling Is A Blast!"



HELP WANTED

We're not perfect. During the next 6 months we're bound to make some mistakes. We'll also need to make changes from time to time so as to keep the program convenient, effective and economical. But everyone working on this program will be making an honest effort to make this a good program and one which will continue for years to come.

What we need is your patience and understanding. If we miss collecting your materials some time; when we make suggestions that don't work quite as well as we'd hoped; or when we have other problems. We'd like to know when problems occur.

This newsletter is part of a real commitment on our part to establish a communications link with you. In fact, you'll be receiving a monthly newsletter, like this one, until at least next February. Its purpose is

to let you know what's going on; why we're doing things the way we are, and how you and others are benefitting.

We also want to share with you our ideas and experience about how to reduce, reuse and recycle what used to be garbage. What's more, we'd like this to be a positive experience for you, because each of us has more than enough things to do which aren't that way. So we'll be doing stories on other subjects occasionally, which might be of interest to you.

You can really help us here, too, by letting us know how you feel about the program. Please, give us your ideas, suggestions, feeling, experiences and tips so we can learn from them and share them with others. You can call or write our office.

A Special September Reminder

The Message Of The Marathon

Note: This article is presented as a special community service and is in recognition of the unique achievement of Terry Fox.

On September 13th, millions of people across Canada will be remembering Terry Fox and carrying on his Marathon of Hope. This will be a truly special occasion. There will be no restrictions on who takes part. People of all kinds will be taking this opportunity to celebrate their memories of Terry, his actions and his ideas.

In one sense, this could be looked upon as a time of sadness. We could choose to dwell on Terry's inability to finish his cross-country trek. Some of us may be disappointed that we did not 'pay more attention' when he was making his run. We might also be tempted to concentrate on the fears of what Terry seemed to represent: a handicap, cancer, pain, losing control over one's own life, or death. But is that really the perspective we would choose?

This was — and still is — a Marathon of *Hope!* It's one man who confronted his own fears about these issues and who chose to look beyond them to his dreams. It's the courage, the determination, the unflinching sense of confidence and hope which he carried with him, and which he shared with the people who came to know him.

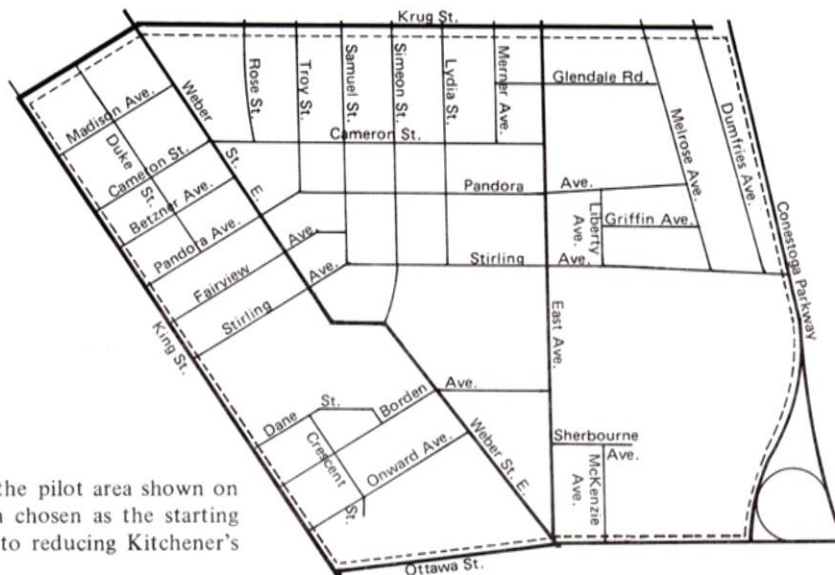
Terry and his Marathon of Hope have been like a master key, opening up the hearts and minds of millions of people. Through this experience, we have found within ourselves a powerful desire to give what is precious to us, whether that be money, time and energy, trust, or love. Yet we have given without expectation of 'getting something in return'. What's more, we have gained new feelings of hope and togetherness beyond any measure or comparison to what we may have given.

The fact that Terry is not still running for us has not ended his dream — or ours. The unceasing donations and the events planned across Canada for September, 13th show us that. With Terry's help we have learned what the actions of a single person can do. We have found that each of us has a great deal to share. And we have realized that the message of the Marathon is hope, not fear.

(For more information on how to participate in The Terry Fox Run for the Marathon of Hope, call (416) 895-5159 in Newmarket. For more information on general support, contact the local office of the Cancer Society — 886-8888.

RECYCLING PROGRAM REMINDERS

*Reduce
Reuse
Recycle*



Your home is located in the pilot area shown on this map. This area has been chosen as the starting point for a total approach to reducing Kitchener's garbage.

COLLECTION: Each Thursday, the same day as your regular garbage pick-up. When garbage is changed due to a holiday, your recycling collection also changes.

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HOW: Use open containers, such as brown bags or old cardboard boxes, so that recyclables can easily be identified by the recycling collection crew.

PREPARE your newspapers, glass, metal, and other paper as follows:

METAL: Tin cans only (no pop cans with aluminum tops). Rinse, remove paper labels, and flatten.

NEWSPAPERS: Stack everything that comes with your paper and bundle with sturdy string or twine.

OTHER PAPER: Paper only, no plastic, foil, or wax. Old cardboard boxes, old letters, mail, and other office-type papers, any clean food or soap boxes, and old brown 'grocery' bags should simply be flattened. No books, magazines or phone books allowed.

GLASS: Remove any metal from bottles and jars and rinse. Paper labels can be left on.

More Information:

Nyle Ludolph,
General Manager
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P.O. Box 10
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N2G 3W9
Tel. 744-3367 ext. 259

Please Save



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Wanting to Find What Works

In order to learn what’s most effective for maximizing participation and materials recovery, we added some additional elements to the program:

- some residents received face-to-face visits prior to start-up, to introduce them to the program and answer questions;
- a six-month continuing education effort, with monthly newsletters to keep people informed and provide feedback on how the program was going; and
- an ongoing monitoring and research effort, to gather information on which households were participating, what materials people were putting out to the curb (and the level of contamination), and what factors appeared to have the greatest impact on people taking part.

The Blue Box was also part of this effort. In fact, it had two primary purposes. One was to make it easy for people to collect their materials at home and carry them out to the street. The other was to raise awareness. We believed that if people saw others recycling, it would encourage them to do so as well. To test this, we distributed several hundred boxes, randomly across the test area, to see how these would affect participation. And it later turned out that seeing ‘blue boxes on the street’ would play an important role in our success.

The Test Program Begins

With Labour Day over and people starting their Fall routines, September 17th was selected as our launch day. That morning, Laidlaw/Superior/Total began its first collection. Jack McGinnis and I went to take photos at the home of Peter McGough, president of the local Ratepayers Association. And we all waited... to see how many people would take part.

By day’s end, we were ‘blown away.’ Across the demonstration area, hundreds of residents had put out their recyclables to the curb and blue boxes dotted the streets. The program also received good coverage from local newspapers and television stations. We knew we had created something that caught peoples’ imaginations.

By the end of the third weekly collection, nearly 50% of households had participated at least once, with over 11,000 kg. (or 25,000 lb.) of materials being collected. That was great! But we didn’t want to stop there. So in our next newsletter, we shared the good news with residents – while encouraging people who weren’t yet participating, and those who had set out only one or two materials (i.e. newspaper, mixed papers, cans or glass) to try for all four!

In that newsletter, we added extensive information about home composting as well. This wasn’t something that would make Laidlaw/Superior any money – in fact, it could actually cut their revenues, because less garbage would be collected for landfill. However, this was part of our overall mission to reduce waste as a whole. Our belief was that, if we created benefits for the City, this would in some way benefit Laidlaw over the longer term.

(See this newsletter, following pages.)

First Newsletter after start-up

THE TOTAL NEWS

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . . REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

New Recycling Program a Major Success

Thanks to you and your neighbours, the new recycling program in the Central Ottawa Street area is off to a booming start. During the first three weeks of collection over 25,000 pounds of newspapers, glass containers, tin cans and other paper products have been recovered for recycling, from the approximately 1,100 homes covered by the program. While these figures in themselves represent quite an achievement, there still remains

room for improvement. To date, approximately 50% of all households in the area have become active participants. In some cases, those not participating may not yet have heard about the program, while others may be waiting to see whether their neighbours will get involved. *Again, we would like to ask everyone for their support* – for those few minutes every week which can add up to a solution to Kitcheners garbage problem.

How You Can Help

First of all, decide to participate. It's easy, and you will be making an important contribution to the success of the whole program. For those households already participating, we would like to offer a few suggestions to further improve the program:

1. Many people have picked up the newspaper recycling habit. And while we know it takes a little more effort still, we would like to see more households recovering their empty tin cans and glass bottles and jars. As with anything new, it takes a little time to break old habits, to rinse out and save old containers that used to be considered garbage. You will be surprised though to see how quickly recycling becomes a good habit. Please give it a chance.

2. A few small changes will make the job easier for our collection crew. Please be sure to put all recyclables out in OPEN bags or boxes so that they are clearly for recycling. This will help to reduce the chances of the garbage collection crew fighting with the recycling crew over mysterious containers. Set recyclables a few feet away from your garbage to make identification even easier. Please tie all newspapers together tightly to prevent littering and spillage during collection, and please be sure to put all recyclables at the curbside by 8:00 a.m. to be sure they are not missed by our crews. More detailed information on preparing materials for



Peter McGough, President of the Central Ottawa Street Residents Association, hands his recyclables to Steve Murray of Total Recycling Systems Ltd. as Eric Hellman of Resource Integration Systems Ltd. looks on.

recycling is provided on the back of this flyer.

3. Read this newsletter. Starting with today's feature on composting, we will be bringing to your attention other important ways in which you and your family can reduce the amount of garbage produced in

your home. Future issues will introduce you to other effective methods on reducing or re-using waste materials, and we would welcome any comments and suggestions that you might like to add yourselves. These can be addressed to Nyle Ludolph, Total Recycling Systems, P.O. Box 10, Kitchener, N2G 3W9, or call 744-3367, ext. 259.

REMINDER: Due to the Thanksgiving holiday on Monday, recycling collection changes to Friday for this week only. Collection returns to regular Thursday again next week.

Save Yourself a Bagful . . . And a Bundle!

Here's an opportunity to save money, improve your garden *and* make a real dent in the garbage you throw out each week. Hundreds of people in Kitchener are already reaping these and other benefits using a simple, fast and economical process that's been proven effective. What's more, the key to these savings is as close as your kitchen or your own backyard.

Each week the average Kitchener family throws out about *16 pounds* of yard and kitchen" wastes. Leaves. Grass. Vegetable and fruit scraps. These seemingly insignificant materials add up to over 20,000 tons of garbage annually for the City as a whole!

This waste costs us all a lot of money, energy, and resources, in addition to adding to pollution problems. But it doesn't have to be this way; we have practical alternatives.

Composting Can Work For You

Composting is nature's way of recycling "organic" materials. Quite simply, it involves the breakdown of yard and food wastes by natural soil organisms. The end product of this process can be used as a soil conditioner and fertilizer because it is generally rich in nutrients and useful organic materials.

Backyard composting is a simple, effective and inexpensive way to put your wastes to work for you. By cutting your waste generation, and therefore your purchase of garbage bags, and by replacing costly artificial fertilizers, composting can save you money.

It also help us to reduce the cost of garbage collection. If this test program results in a major reduction in waste collected, we can reduce the cost of our service to the City – and the savings can be passed along to you.

Mulching is Fast and Easy

Mulching is a way of composting directly on your lawn and garden. It's fast, easy and requires no expense at all.

Mulch refers to a layer of organic material spread on the ground. Two common materials used for this purpose are grass clippings and leaves. When these are left on the lawn/garden surface they naturally breakdown and 'fertilize' your garden. It's for this reason that many homeowners don't collect cut grass between mowings, choosing instead to leave it on as mulch. (Since small particles breakdown faster

than larger ones, it's also useful to shred leaves with the lawn mower and use these as mulch as well.)

Mulching benefits your garden soil and plants in many ways. It conserves soil moisture by reducing evaporation. (This saves on lawn watering, too.) It improves the health of your garden by adding valuable nutrients and organic matter. Mulch also reduces the need for weeding by cutting the sunlight which reaches these plants.

At this time of year, leaving grass and leaf mulch on the lawn and garden is an excellent way to protect and prepare them for spring.



3 Easy Steps to Composting

'Containerized' Composting Does Even More

Another effective way to compost is by using a container or enclosure for collecting organic materials. These can be purchased or made at home.

Enclosed compost 'piles' are popular for many reasons. They can handle many different types of wastes; for example, leaves, grass, plants, fruit and vegetable scraps, tea bags, coffee grounds, egg shells, and even sawdust and animal droppings. (Note: do *not* use meat or fat.) As long as the container is large enough – about 9 cubic feet or more – sufficient heat will build up inside so as to break down most materials and kill any unsafe bacteria.

A composter is particularly useful in

the City because it neatly contains waste organic matter in a small space and protects it from animals. It can also be used year-round. (Even if the material freezes, it will thaw and break down in warmer weather and the finished product can be used for spring planting.)

"Why Wait For Spring? Do It NOW!"

Here are a few ideas to get you started.

1. If you'd like to *buy* an attractive composter for use right now, *call us*. We have excellent composters, plus instructions, for only \$25.00. Other models are also available through department stores and garden centres.

2. **Do-it-yourselfers** can make many types of enclosures. The information sheet included in this newsletter gives examples. Books on home composting also give tips on making your own. (Try your local library or bookstore, or give us a call.)

3. **In the kitchen:** To collect organic wastes, use a bucket, jar or container with a lid. That way you can reduce your trips outside and keep your kitchen smelling fresh.

4. **In the yard:** Locate your composter close to the house so it will be easy to use year-round.

5. **Mixing materials:** For best results, mix different materials. Too much of one material cuts down air circulation and creates a nutrient deficiency. (Very wet material can cause similar problems.)

6. **Leaves:** If you have too many for your composter, you can store them in dark, heavy-gauge plastic bags (punch some air holes for ventilation). The leaves will break down into a lovely smelling and useful leaf mould which can be used for gardening in the spring.

7. **For more information:** Call us; talk with your neighbours, local garden clubs, nurseries/garden shops. A little information makes composting a lot easier.

Our Goal: Satisfaction!

Many people find that composting gives them a lot of personal satisfaction. It doesn't require special skills. You can see the results of your efforts. And it's a practical way for you to make a difference and improve the quality of life in your community.

Good luck and happy composting!

Composting: Garbage is Gold

WHAT IS COMPOSTING? Composting is the breakdown of organic material by soil organisms.

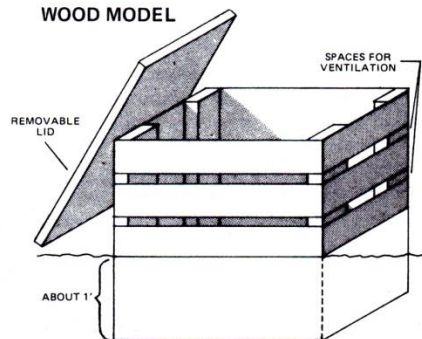
WHY COMPOST? The finished compost is an excellent fertilizer-conditioner for your garden. At the same time, you are reducing by one-quarter the amount of garbage you throw away – 25% of residential waste consists of kitchen and yard waste.

THE BASIC INGREDIENTS: The composting process requires 1) organic material, 2) air, 3) moisture and 4) soil. The organic material should consist of some kitchen waste, such as fruit and vegetable peelings, coffee grounds, tea leaves and egg shells, and some garden waste, such as leaves, grass clippings, and plants. Do not add meat scraps as they may attract animals, and fats are not acceptable because they do not break down well.

You don't have to do much more than alternate layers of organic wastes and soil, keep them moist and turn frequently; however, the composting process will be much more efficient if you follow the following suggestions.

HOW TO DO IT: Put a layer of organic material in the bottom of the pile. To help get the process started you can add a layer of a nutrient-rich material such as composted cow or sheep manure, bone meal or a commercial starter. Add a layer of earth and moisten. Continue to layer kitchen waste, yard waste, and earth until the pile is full. Moisten if needed. A light rain will do the job for you, but a cover is needed to prevent the pile from getting too wet in a heavy rain. The cover will also discourage animals from having a snack at night. Allow the pile to remain undisturbed for approximately four weeks. Then turn it with a pitch fork so that the pile is well aerated. You may wish to turn a partly full pile and then continue adding to it. It is best to have two compost piles, or one container divided into two sections. When one pile is full and brewing, you can continue to add new material to the second.

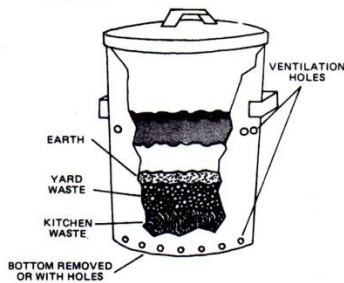
WOOD MODEL



CONTAINERS: The same basic procedure can be followed in a variety of ways.

- 1) You can dig a shallow pit about 12" deep in a corner of your yard. Save the earth you have dug out, as you will need it for cover material. A wire fence can be used to protect small children or animals. A plastic sheet can serve as a cover.
- 2) You can use an old garbage can with holes punched in the sides and bottom for ventilation, or you can remove the bottom altogether.
- 3) There are different types of containers you can construct. A container with a wood frame and top, and wire mesh sides is one possibility. Or you can build a wooden box with a separate top and no bottom. Allow spaces of about ½" between the boards for ventilation. The size and shape of these containers can vary: 3'X4' or 4'X4' is a good size. You can place them directly on the ground or over a hole you have dug in the ground to a depth of about 1' and slightly smaller than the container. The total depth should not be too great, or you may have difficulty reaching in to turn with a pitch fork.

GARBAGE CAN MODEL



SOME QUESTIONS:

How long will it take? This will vary. If your kitchen and yard waste is in small pieces, the process will be faster. Similarly, frequent turning will speed the process. In general you can anticipate having finished compost twice a year, once in the early summer and once in the fall.

What can you do with the finished compost? Put it on your vegetable garden or flower beds, or prepare it for indoor use. To do this first put it through a strainer to produce a finer dirt. Then bake it in an old pan for 2 hours at 200 degrees to kill weed seeds and insects.

What do you do in the winter? You can continue to add material to your pile throughout the winter. It will simply freeze, but as soon as the weather warms up in the spring the process will begin again.

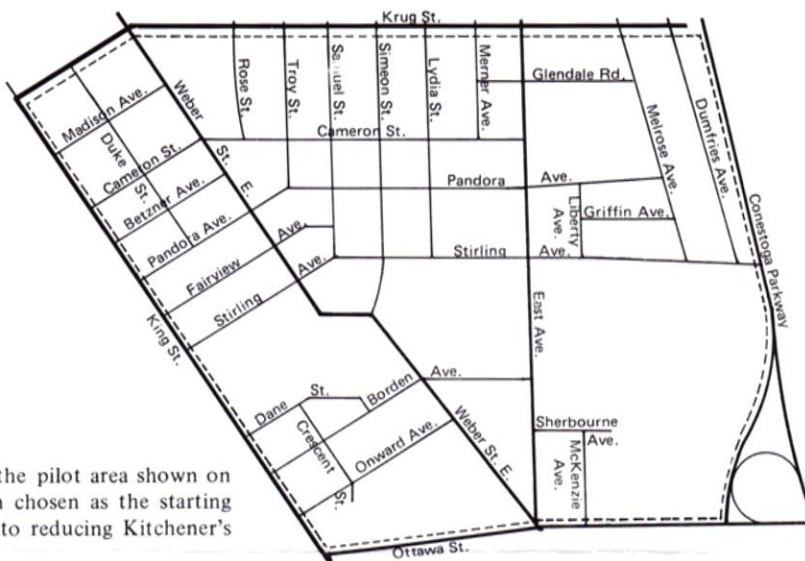
What do you do if it smells? A compost pile that is working well should not have an unpleasant odour. If it does, it may be that the material is too wet and compacted. This sometimes

happens in the spring if there is a lot of rain. The solution is to turn the pile frequently to allow it to dry out a bit and to ensure that it is well aerated.

Can large quantities of fall leaves be added to the pile? It is best to avoid putting on too thick a layer of any one material, such as leaves. They can clump together and break down poorly. You can put some leaves on your pile, and save some to add later after you have added other materials. And don't forget, you can also add some leaves directly to your garden.

RECYCLING PROGRAM REMINDERS

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Recycle*



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Please Save



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RECYCLING SYSTEMS LTD.

Growing an 'Environment' of Awareness and Support

Our 1100-home demonstration area was a very small part of Kitchener-Waterloo, which at the time had a combined population of roughly 100,000 people. Yet we believed that if we could create an environment of support throughout the entire community, this would help boost participation in our test neighbourhood. Therefore, as the program continued, we added other initiatives to grow awareness and interest in recycling and waste reduction across the City. This included:

- ongoing contact with city officials, ratepayers groups and local media
- education sessions to start office paper recycling programs at two City buildings
- media releases and interviews, plus other events to grow interest in the community
- continuing education for residents and feedback on progress of the program, and
- giving away 25 composters (without charge) to residents in the demonstration area.

'What is in our Waste?'

Another important part of the test program was educating ourselves about what materials were actually in the local garbage. Understanding this is an essential step towards knowing how to reduce, reuse and recycle it. But it also takes 'getting into it'!

Thus one cold winter morning, we went to the streets and picked up samples of garbage from homes in the test area. We took them to Laidlaw's works yard and then, piece by piece, sorted them by hand (*thank heavens it was winter and things were largely frozen*), to determine exactly what kinds of materials and volumes were being thrown away.

This may sound a bit excessive for a project of 1100 homes.* But remember our larger goal: We wanted to learn *what would work anywhere*, so we would actually have the possibility of 'shaping the future of waste management' across the country.

**Note: Throughout this paper, you may notice references to 1000 homes and 1100 homes in the test area. The actual number was between the two, but closer to 1100.*

(See next two newsletters below.)

Second Newsletter after start-up

THE TOTAL NEWS

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . . REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Special Notice to Residents

NEW COMPOSTING PROGRAM LAUNCHED

Kitchener's new Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Program is off to an excellent start! The special Thursday recycling collections in your neighbourhood have already recovered over 25,000 pounds of newspaper, glass, metal and other paper products. It's the efforts and support of people like you which have made this demonstration program the success it is so far.

The purpose of this special edition of *The Total News* is to share with you the next important step in our total waste prevention program.

That's a Lot of Waste!

You're probably aware by now that recyclable newspaper, glass, metal and other papers contribute in a big way to our weekly garbage totals. Most people don't know, however, that another recyclable resource — kitchen and yard waste — outweighs almost every other type of material in their garbage.

It may be hard to believe, but those fruit peelings, vegetable scraps, leaves, grass clippings and other "organic" wastes make up over 35% of all municipal wastes. Each year that's over 22,000 tons of nutrients and useful organic material which get collected as garbage and buried in regional landfill sites!

Fortunately there is an alternative: **home composting.**

Composting is not new; in fact, that's one of the best things about it. It has proven, through years of experience, to be an effective, easy and inexpensive way to change most organic wastes into earth or soil. This change occurs by a very natural and safe process called decomposition. And although you may not be aware of it, it's the same process which occurs all the time in your lawn and garden.

Save Money, Energy, Resources

Backyard composting is especially useful for this test program because it can substantially reduce the amount of waste that needs to be collected by our garbage trucks and crews. If this special program results in a major reduction in wastes collected, we can reduce the cost of garbage collection to the City — and those savings can be passed along to you.



3 Easy Steps to Composting

In addition to potential tax savings, composting conserves energy and resources. The earth-end-product can be used as a fertilizer or soil conditioner, thereby reducing the need to manufacture artificial fertilizers which you'd normally buy. That also saves you money.

Finally, many people find that composting gives them a lot of personal satisfaction. It doesn't require special skills. You can see the result of your efforts. And it's a practical way for you to make a difference and improve the quality of life in your community.

FREE COMPOSTERS!

In order to help you get started, we're providing free composters to the **first 25 people** receiving this flyer who call us. We'll also provide you with free information on how to compost and we'll deliver everything right to your door. All you need to do is:

1. Decide to participate.
2. Call Total Recycling, weekdays between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., to arrange for delivery.

Please call us **before next Friday, October 9th.** The number is **744-3367, extension 259.**

After you begin composting, we'll be available to answer questions you may have and to help you to deal with difficulties which may arise. We want to work with you to make this project, and our total Reduce, Reuse, Recycle program a lasting success.

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RECYCLING SYSTEMS LTD.

Third Newsletter after start-up

THE TOTAL NEWS

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . . REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

City Staff Saves Trees

Municipal officials and staff will save over 190 trees during the next year, *without even leaving their offices*. Their key to success? A new office paper recycling program at City Hall and the Kitchener Revenue Building.

Launched September 23rd, the new program is believed to be the first of its kind in Kitchener. A special ceremony held in the office of Mayor Morley Rosenberg helped to kick off the program. On hand to show their co-operation and support were City Co-ordinator James Darrah, Public Works Director of Operations Steve Gyorffy, Zig Janecki representing Union Local 791, and Nyle Ludolph, General Manager of Total Recycling Systems Ltd. The project was initiated by Total Recycling and Superior Sanitation Services as part of the new Kitchener **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** demonstration program.

Special Benefits

Mr. Ludolph presented the Mayor and the City with a pine tree to mark the occasion. In doing so, he noted that the recycling of paper to be recovered from the two buildings will save an estimated 190 mature trees each year. And apart from saving trees, said Ludolph, the program has many added benefits. These include: energy and water conservation, pollution reduction, plus waste collection and disposal savings.

According to Mayor Rosenberg, "this new program is a tangible way for City politicians and staff to show the public our commitment to conservation." Furthermore, said Rosenberg, "it clearly shows that our individual actions do make a difference, both at home and in the workplace. Recycling is a good example of a 'small' activity that makes a big difference when we all work together."

27 Trees To Date

So far, after only 7 weeks of the program, 3,200 pounds of paper have been collected for recycling. That is equivalent to about 27 trees saved – and the number is growing daily.

Thank you City staff for your co-operation in making the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle program a success!

CURBSIDE PROGRAM UPDATE:

Support for the Total Recycling program in the Central Ottawa Street area continues to grow steadily. Over 65% of all households in the demonstration area have now participated by separating out old newspapers, glass, tin cans and other papers. The few minutes this requires of individuals each week has resulted in total recovery of 62,900 lbs. of valuable materials which would previously have ended up in the regional landfill site. By recycling these materials, local residents have directly contributed to the conservation of the equivalent of almost 2,000 gallons of gasoline and 550 trees, in the first nine weeks of the program. Extended over a full year, this will reach over 11,500 gallons of gasoline and 3,100 trees – savings which will grow year after year. And there is still room for improvement! We would appreciate the added support of those households not yet participating, and we encourage everyone to save their old newspapers, glass bottles and jars, tin cans and other recyclable papers.

Thank you for your support.

Nyle Ludolph,
General Manager



Nyle Ludolph, General Manager of Total Recycling Systems Ltd., presents Mayor Rosenberg with a tree.

GLASS RECYCLING — a little extra effort/lots of rewards

A unique aspect of the Superior Sanitation/Total Recycling program in the Central Ottawa Street area is the collection of *four* major fractions of the waste stream — newspapers, glass, tin cans and other forms of paper. Your efforts in keeping these waste materials separate from your garbage provides the first and most important step in the process of recycling.

In this issue of our newsletter we would like to take the opportunity to explain to you what happens to one of these materials — glass — after you have set out your old bottles and jars at the curbside. Later issues will do the same for other recyclable materials.

Now That's Recycling!

Almost all of the old glass bottles and jars collected in Ontario are recycled into new bottles and jars.

In your neighbourhood, the Total Recycling crew begins this process by picking up your glass (along with other materials) from the curbside, and storing this material in separate containers in the collection vehicle. When these containers are filled, the truck returns to our yard on Ardelt Avenue where the weekly collection is transferred to larger storage/shipping containers. Once a full load of approximately 10–12 tons has been accumulated, this container load is then shipped to

glass manufacturing plants in Toronto, for reprocessing.

The first step in preparing these old containers for remanufacturing is to crush the glass and remove all contaminants. The most serious contaminants are metal tops and rings, and pieces of ceramic from old dishes etc. These materials constitute a serious problem in the next stage of the process — melting this material in the glass furnace. Pieces of metal or ceramic imbedded in a new container create a clear blemish and weaken the strength of the glass. Furthermore, these materials accumulate on the floor of the furnace, leading to increased maintenance problems and the possibility of damage to the furnace itself. (It's for this reason that we ask you to remove all metal from your bottles and jars and not to include any material other than glass.) The molten glass is then molded into new containers. So, the bottles and jars you save for recycling today, may return to you in a new container tomorrow!

Benefits to Everyone

The benefits of glass recycling are multiple:

- **Energy savings in re-processing** — it takes less energy to produce new glass products from old glass than from new raw materials (such as silica sand, soda ash, feldspar and limestone). This saving

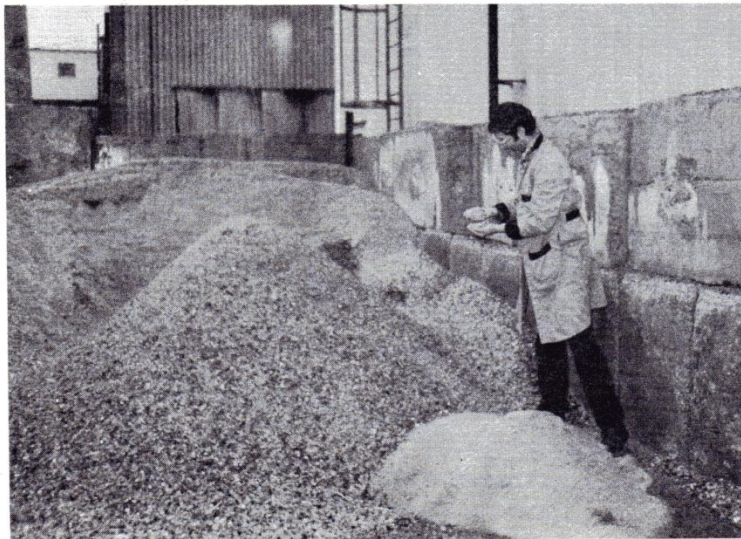


Pieces of metal and ceramic are serious contaminants which must be removed by hand. Please remove caps and rings from bottles and do not include ceramics or crockery.

may be as high as 20% or more.

- **Energy savings in extracting and transporting raw materials.** In general, the energy expended in crushing and transporting waste glass to the manufacturing plant is less than one half of the energy required to extract and ship an equivalent amount of new raw material to the same plant.
- **Longer life for the glass furnaces.** The use of waste glass in the manufacturing process allows the glass companies to operate their furnaces at lower temperatures, which results in significant increases in the usable life of these furnaces.
- **Less environmental pollutants in the manufacturing process** from the use of waste glass, and less extraction of raw materials.
- **Longer landfill life and reduced waste management costs.** Every ton of glass recycled is one ton of garbage that is not collected and dumped in the landfill site.

So please, take those few extra minutes each week to make glass recycling a success.



Bottles and jars have been crushed and cleaned and the glass is now ready for use in the furnace.

NO COMMENT!

There are many things we could say about the new recycling program – how pleased we are with your support; encouragement to people who haven't yet participated; or reassurance to those who may be wondering whether or not their actions really are 'making a difference'.

But rather than tell you more about what we think or feel, we'd like to let your neighbours do the talking. Their words need no comment!

Marie Shantz, Dumfries Ave.

"I've heard about (recycling) for a long time and I'd thought about doing it. But it took the extra push of your program to get me started."

"It's easier to put my cans, cardboard, newspapers and glass out for collection rather than taking it somewhere."

"Even my kids are doing it. They enjoy stomping on the cans."

"If my children learn now, maybe they'll do it when they're on their own."

Leone Smith, Dane St.

"My son used to take our newspaper to his school. I was disappointed when it stopped.

I think (this new program) is a great idea!"

"I'm for recycling everything."

"I don't mind washing bottles at all."

"I realize I'm putting out less garbage."

"I keep my bags and boxes until they're

full. What's the point of putting out half a box . . . and having your truck pick it up? That costs more. I'm for everyone saving whatever we can."

Retired Man (name withheld by request), Fairview Ave.

"We get a kick out of doing it."

"I'm retired, so it's something extra for me to do."

"I still like to give my papers to the Scouts. So I put out cans, bottles and clean paper. It's not difficult."

"I'd never heard of recycling these before, but I think it's a heck of a good idea."

"Some people don't clean and take the labels off their cans. Once I started, it's easy."

"I haven't started doing 'your new composting system'. But I do use some leaves and other (wastes) in the garden."

Waltraud Maimann, Duke St.

"It's nothing new for me. We did this in Germany before we came here."

"It was a change when I could throw just anything away. It's easier for me to change back (than for others to start)."

"It's a little more work, but it's not really hard. It's a matter of getting used to it."

"We used to put paper away for Scouts and school programs. It's easier for me putting it out to the street for pickup every week."

"I was composting before you started your program. I use all my kitchen garbage and so on in the compost. I cover it with soil regularly in my garden. It doesn't bother my neighbours. And I don't have to buy anything (such as fertilizers)."

Thank you!



"Recycling is a sure way to cut waste," says Brice Balmer of Simeon Street.



Reduce Reuse Recycle

Collection day for recyclables is every THURSDAY, the same day as your regular garbage pick-up. When garbage collection changes due to a holiday, your recycling collection also changes.



HOW TO PREPARE YOUR MATERIALS



After preparing your recyclables, please place them at the curbside several feet away from your regular garbage.

NEWSPAPERS

Everything that comes with your newspaper can be stacked together and should be bundled with sturdy string or twine.

GLASS

Remove any metal from bottles and jars and rinse. Please do not include any ceramic material or crockery.

TIN CANS

Rinse out cans, remove paper labels and flatten. Please do not include pop cans or other metal containers with aluminum.

OTHER PAPER

Old cardboard boxes, writing paper, clean food and soap boxes and old brown grocery bags should be flattened and tied in bundles. Please do not include old books, magazines or phone books.

ABOUT THOSE BLUE BOXES . . .

Many of you will have noticed those blue recycling boxes on some streets in the Central Ottawa Street area. These special containers are part of a test by Total Recycling to continually improve its recycling program. We are attempting to evaluate their impact on participation, their durability and their cost effectiveness. Therefore, they have been distributed only to a limited number of homes on an experimental basis.

MORE INFORMATION . . .

Any questions, comments or concerns you may have about the Total Recycling Program can be addressed to:

Nyle Ludolph,
 General Manager,
 Total Recycling Systems Ltd.
 P.O. Box 10
 Kitchener, Ontario
 N2G 3W9
 Tel. 744-3367, ext. 259



SANITATION SERVICES LTD.



RECYCLING SYSTEMS LTD.

The Program Continues... but not without issues

By early November, about 65% of residents had taken part, with over 28,000 kg. (nearly 63,000 lbs.) of materials being collected for recycling. The program *was* going extremely well. Yet that didn't mean there weren't problems. Here are just a few that we experienced:

1) Contamination of materials being put out for recycling

One of the major problems in recycling programs is the contamination of materials collected. This reduces their value when sold to manufacturers. In our test program, some materials were not being fully sorted or set out separately. And some were contaminated by other wastes (e.g. not cleaned properly). We used our newsletters to communicate this to residents.

2) “Paper pirates” were taking newspapers set out for our collections.

This was a common problem for many municipal recycling programs at the time. When market prices were strong, these ‘entrepreneurs’ would drive the streets early on collection days and pick up newspapers which had been set out at the curb. This paper would then be sold to local recycling dealers – thereby reducing the income that would otherwise have been earned by the Laidlaw/Superior program.

3) A slump in recycling markets

Several months into our test, we faced our most serious challenge. Recycling markets and prices took a sharp decline. As described earlier, this was one of the key issues which often caused local collections to fail. Just as people get into the habit of recycling, programs would often be shut down due to their inability to sell materials they had collected.

Knowing this could happen, Laidlaw/Superior were ready. First, they made a clear commitment to keep the program running. Second, with the help of Jack Rosen's marketing expertise and using local storage space as needed, they were able to get through these market slumps and keep the program operating.

The “Blue Box” was catching on...

Month by month, the program continued to grow. By the end of 1981, almost 80% of homes had participated at least once. The amount collected per household was increasing. And positive feedback was coming in from residents across the test area (see previous newsletter). With financial help from the Ontario Waste Management Advisory Board, we expanded our education efforts by creating a community resource guide, designed to help people *reduce and reuse* more of their wastes.

The “blue boxes” we had given to some residents were also catching on. In fact, this was quickly becoming the symbol of the program. Residents within the test area, who had not received a box, were now asking for one. People in neighbourhoods outside the test area began asking for a “blue box program” as well. Local government, the media and the city as a whole were getting excited by it. And the ideas of “reduce, reuse, recycle, and making a difference” were starting to grow across the City of Kitchener.

(See next newsletter, below.)

Fourth Newsletter after start-up

THE TOTAL NEWS

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE . . . REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – the three R's of Environment

Since the pilot recycling program was first launched in the Central Ottawa Street area of Kitchener this past September, the phrase 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' has been part of all the information promoting the weekly recycling collection. Till now, the main emphasis has been on the third 'R' – *recycle* – and this part of the program has been a solid success. 80% of the residents in this area have now participated in the recycling collection. You and your neighbours have shown that *people can make a difference*. We now hope that you will help with your support and co-operation to tackle the remaining two R's – *reduce and reuse*.

The 3 R's, and the order in which they are stated, are intended to represent the most environmentally and economically sound way of dealing with garbage.

For example, many area residents have been placing their discarded brown paper bags out for the recycling collection each week. This is obviously much better than if these paper bags were sent off to the landfill site as garbage. An even better option would be for people to *reuse* these bags a second or third time, particularly if this enables them to avoid purchasing or receiving another bag.

Examples of this reuse would be taking your own grocery bags when you shop, or using bags you have already received for packing lunches, rather than buying bags specially for this purpose.

The best option, when it's possible, is to *reduce* the total waste you generate by completely avoiding something that will become waste. Staying with the paper bag

as an example, there are often times that you purchase one or two items at a store, and don't really need a bag to carry them home. By declining a bag, you directly *reduce* the total amount of garbage produced.

There are literally hundreds of ways that each of us can minimize the impact of wastes on our environment by reducing the production of waste and reusing various products and materials. Matched with the already successful recycling program, the result can be a comprehensive solution to waste management concerns here in Kitchener. As a further benefit, one which occurs in a more direct and personal way, many reduction and reuse activities will also bring clear financial rewards. For example, some grocery stores now offer cash incentives to encourage shoppers to bring their own bags to the store. What's more, products which have less packaging (or reusable packaging, like soft drinks in refillable bottles) often cost less. So, the more you save, the more you save.

Over the coming months we will be using the **Total News** and other methods to describe some of the most practical and beneficial reduction and reuse activities that you, your family, and your neighbours can actively pursue. Some of this program is described elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter. We hope that you will support this part of the program with the same enthusiasm that you have shown for the recycling collection.

As always, we welcome your comments and advice. Your suggestions can make a difference to the success of this program.

MARKET PROBLEMS . . . *but program will continue!*

In the face of a worldwide slump in paper recycling markets, Total Recycling has decided to close its materials buy-back centre for an indefinite period.

Since January, 1981, this recycling centre has been open every Saturday morning to buy paper, metal and glass at 1 cent per pound from the public. Up to 150 people per day have taken their materials to the centre, located at the Superior Sanitation yard in Kitchener.

Closing the centre is a step we'd prefer not to take. Unfortunately we just can't afford to buy back any more material.

There's Good News, Too . . .

Despite the market problems, we will be continuing the **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** program in Centre Ward.

Total Recycling and Superior Sanitation have worked hard to establish this program. We also know that you have put a lot of energy into making it a success. Close to 80% of the people in this area have participated so far, recycling over 39 tons!

We believe recycling is the 'way of the future'. It saves energy and resources; it creates jobs; and it reduces pollution. It's a way for each of us to make life better for all of us.

Together, we have made a difference – and we look forward to working with you in the months, and the years, to come.

NYLE LUDOLPH
General Manager



Did you know that . . .

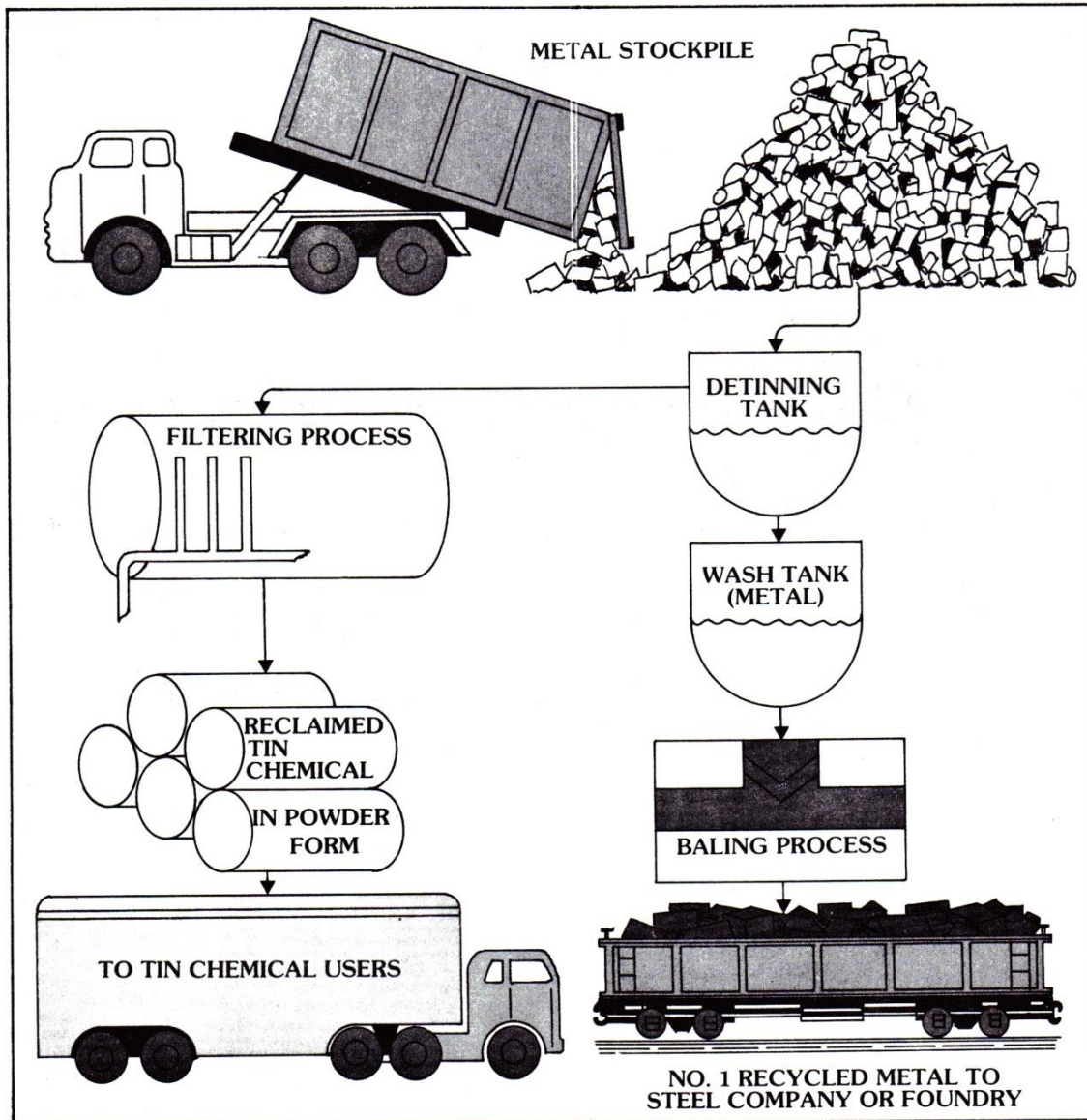
1) "TIN CANS" ARE REALLY STEEL CANS with a very thin protective coating of tin?

The coating, which is only about 1/10,000th of an inch thick, protects the steel from rusting, assists in making

the side seam, and keeps the contents of the can from acquiring a taste from the steel.

2) To recycle the *steel* part of the can, the TIN MUST BE REMOVED?

Tin is an impurity in the steel-making process, so it must be removed to ensure the production of top-grade steel. Fortunately, we don't have to ask you to try and peel off the tin prior to putting it out for Thursday's collec-



tion! Instead there's an industrial process which removes the tin from the steel and allows both metals to be recycled. This process is called *detinning*.

3) The **ONLY DETINNING PLANT IN CANADA** is in Hamilton?

This plant is operated by Metal Recovery Industries Ltd., a division of American Can Canada Inc. Each year, MRI's Hamilton plant detins over 35,000 tons of "tin plate" scrap and tin cans. These 'waste' metal resources are recovered from can manufacturers, mixed municipal wastes and community recycling programs such as this one in Kitchener.

4) **MORE TIN CANS ARE NEEDED?**

The demand for tin cans for recycling has never been higher. In fact, MRI recently increased the price it pays for recyclable tin-steel scrap so as to encourage Total Recycling and other community programs to collect more. *You* can help us to help them.

5) Each week **PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBOURHOOD PUT OUT ABOUT 230 POUNDS OF OLD TIN CANS** for the Thursday recycling collection?

That's a lot of cans! At the same time, many more cans are still being thrown away. They're collected with the regular household waste and then buried. The result? Higher waste collection and disposal costs for you, and less energy and metal conservation for all of us.

6) **CAN COLLECTION IN THE HOME IS AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3, 4?**

- (1) Take the lid entirely off the can before you remove its contents.
- (2) Remove the label, then rinse the can (e.g., just before letting the wash water out of the sink after doing the dishes) and allow it to dry.
- (3) Remove the other end, flatten the

can (by standing on it) and put all pieces in a brown paper bag for storage.

- (4) When the bag's full, put it out for the Total Recycling collection.

That's all there is to it. We do the rest.

(7) **IMPORTANT! ALUMINUM CANNOT BE RECYCLED IN THIS PROGRAM.**

If *any* aluminum products, such as pop cans, foil trays, dessert cups, etc.,

are mixed with your tin cans, MRI will pay us **60% LESS** for the material. This will mean the difference between a program which pays for itself, and one which goes broke. So please help us to keep this program going.

Tin can recycling . . . it's another way you CAN make a difference! (if you'll pardon the pun.)

Special Kitchener resource book coming soon

In order to make this new **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** program more practical and successful, Total Recycling, with support from the Waste Management Advisory Board, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, is producing a special resource book.

The most convenient and practical reduction and reuse actions that you and your neighbours can take will be outlined in this book. It is being produced specially for this program in Kitchener, and it has detailed descriptions and contact information for the many local community organi-

zations, social agencies, and businesses that are a necessary part of individual and community action to reduce and reuse waste in our homes.

This resource book will be distributed to homes throughout the Central Ottawa Street area within the next month. We hope that it will help you to participate in the **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** program, and that you will let us know if you have any comments or suggestions about how it can be expanded or changed to be of more help.

Volunteers Wanted!

Join the war on waste

Many of the waste reduction and reuse activities that work best in a community such as Kitchener are those which involve groups of residents from within the community, rather than individuals acting completely alone. We'd like your help here in the Central Ottawa Street area.

Ideally, we would like to have one key volunteer on each street throughout this community. This would make it possible to organize and initiate activities with direct representation from each and every part of this area of Kitchener.

We have some ideas ourselves, based partly on successful action in other municipalities — street fairs and sharing exchanges, work with daycare centres and

schools on crafts projects, direct community education, and so forth. However, we would like to hear about your ideas — you know your friends and neighbours in this community better than we do.

If you volunteer, the amount of time you spend and the type of activity you undertake is totally up to you. There will be no set commitment. If you're even a little interested, please contact our office. Depending on the response, we will organize one or more local meetings to discuss possible activities that could be planned for the next several months.

Please join us. *People can make a difference.*

Both tin and steel are recovered from the tin cans you recycle.

(Graphic and some information courtesy of Metal Recovery Industries Ltd.)

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR MATERIALS

NEWSPAPERS

Everything that comes with your newspaper can be stacked together and should be bundled with sturdy string or twine.

GLASS

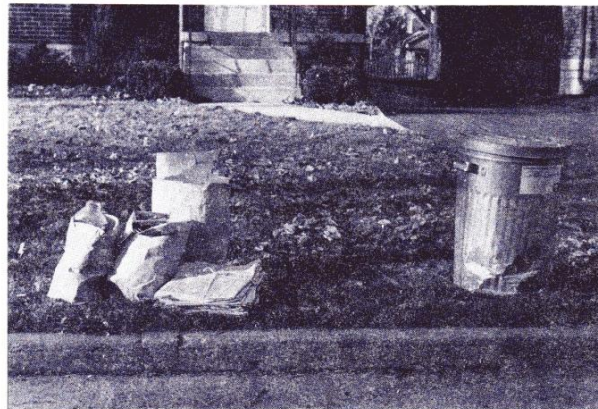
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OTHER PAPER

Old cardboard boxes, writing paper, clean food and soap boxes and old brown grocery bags should be flattened and tied in bundles. Please do not include old books, magazines or phone books.



After preparing your recyclables, please place them at the curbside several feet away from your regular garbage.

SPECIAL NOTICE TO ALL RECYCLERS

"PLEASE DON'T MIX MATERIALS"

Lately we've been finding that some people are mixing different materials — such as glass with metal, or cans with papers — in the same bag, box or blue container. It takes a lot of extra time, and expense, for us to sort these materials when we collect them.

If you'll take a few extra minutes to keep your newspapers, glass, tin cans and mixed papers in separate containers, you'll save us hours each Thursday.

MORE INFORMATION . . .

Any questions, comments or concerns you may have about the Total Recycling Program can be addressed to:

Nyle Ludolph,
General Manager,
Total Recycling Systems Ltd.
P.O. Box 10
Kitchener, Ontario
N2G 3W9
Tel. 744-3367, ext. 259

Reduce Reuse Recycle

Collection day for recyclables is every THURSDAY, the same day as your regular garbage pick-up. When garbage collection changes due to a holiday, your recycling collection also changes.

SUPERIOR
SANITATION SERVICES LTD.



TOTAL
RECYCLING SYSTEMS LTD.

Going City-Wide

Five months after the launch of the demonstration program, I unexpectedly had to leave RIS and the field of recycling. It was a hard decision for me, to leave behind a project I was so passionate about just as it was taking off. However, I was feeling called to take my work to a deeper level, and needed to respond.[4]

The same was not true for the rest of the team, however. And at the end of the six-month test period, the program was declared a resounding success. Ron Murray and Nyle Ludolph decided to keep it going, and they continued to work closely with Jack McGinnis and Derek Stephenson (and their new employee, Doug Hickman).

In the following months, participation continued to grow. Research showed that homes with blue boxes were putting out more materials than those without, and more people were now requesting one. Numerous letters came in asking for the program to expand. And in the following year, Laidlaw/Superior agreed. The decision was made to implement it across all of Kitchener, with every (non-apartment) household to receive a Blue Box. To do this, the company had to invest over \$500,000 to purchase 35,000 “professional” (i.e. better looking and more durable) boxes, as well as new trucks and equipment. And almost immediately after the City-wide program began, close to 85% of residents were taking part. [5]

The new city-wide program was clearly a hit, and continued to be so as the months progressed. The old question of ‘whether or not people would recycle’ was no longer an issue. We had demonstrated they would. But the issue of whether the program *itself* would continue was very much in question...

The Next City Garbage Collection Contract

Kitchener’s garbage collection contract was once again up for renewal, and this time a call for tenders was sent out to the waste management industry.

In a determined move to take the contract away from Laidlaw/Superior, Browning Ferris Industries underbid them by \$400,000. The City of Kitchener was now faced with a big decision: Would they go ahead with Laidlaw and its wildly successful recycling program? Or would they go with BFI, in order to save almost half a million dollars for their next garbage contract?

On the night of the showdown, the City Council meeting was packed. Here’s how it was described by Dianne N. Humphries in her excellent 1997 report, *We Recycle: The Creators of the Blue Box Program*[6]:

Attendance at the meeting was outstanding, including presenters such Colin Isaacs, Executive Director of Pollution Probe, Paul Taylor of the RCO, Nyle Ludolph, members of the Chamber of Commerce and a group of children from Trillium Elementary School, all of whom were promoting the need for recycling. Emotions ran high... What ultimately swayed Council, however, was the performance of three grade four students from Trillium, who read a poem to everyone present about the need for recycling.

{excerpt from poem on next page}

*“The City of Kitchener has a really good thing going its way.
Let’s keep thinking of tomorrow instead of today.
In order that we can make our world a place to live in,
We need to keep recycling, so vote for the Blue Bin...”*

At the end of the meeting, the contract was awarded to Laidlaw. The following day, Jack McGinnis received a phone call from Ron Murray, the President of Laidlaw, stating “I now know what recycling is worth – \$400,000!”

That was the story as it was reported in the media and to Dianne Humphries. It was an event that hit a deep emotional chord for those present, and allowed the first Blue Box program to continue. But perhaps it’s worth asking: *Was that really all that happened?* Could those three young people have been enough to convince City Council to spend \$400,000 more on garbage collection... or did they represent something more, about what the program had become to the city?

What Really ‘Made the Difference’?

Looking *behind* Council’s decision, it’s worth considering all of the small seeds that had been planted in the three years before: The decision by Ron Murray to see garbage differently and try something new. The foundation that was laid to create a successful demonstration program. The value of ongoing education for residents. Laidlaw/Superior’s decisions to help people compost, reuse and reduce waste; to keep the program going in difficult times; and to finance city-wide expansion. The earlier City Hall fine paper recycling program. The excellent relations that had been established with the City, Mayor, Aldermen, ratepayers and media from day one. And of course the visibility and popularity of the Blue Box itself, across the entire community.

Before the Council meeting, the popularity of recycling in Kitchener had reached the point where 85% of people (non-apartment households) were taking part. Council and the media were behind it. No one else had a “blue box” program, and the City was getting recognition from other municipalities as well.

So what really happened that night? The poem-and-costumes of those young people clearly ‘tipped the scales’ in the hearts and minds of City councillors. But maybe THEY were already looking for a way to say “Yes,” even though the dollars didn’t justify it. Perhaps those passionate youngsters simply gave them permission to do so. No one will ever know for sure.

Reflecting on What was to Come...

The growth of the Blue Box – from a local program in Kitchener to the recycling standard across Ontario, and in many cities in Canada and around the world – is too long to possibly describe here (and not the purpose of this report). But here are just a few of the steps:

- Aluminum cans for soft drink packaging were allowed into Ontario, thus helping recycling programs to significantly increase revenues for the materials they recovered.
- Laidlaw started a Blue Box program in Mississauga, which was then the largest recycling program in North America. [7]
- The aluminum, plastic and soft drink industries proposed a large-scale plan for funding recycling programs.

- Jack and Derek at RIS, Paul Taylor at the Recycling Council of Ontario and Collin Isaacs at Pollution Probe worked to help government, industry and NGOs find agreement on the plan.
- The Ontario Government, through the support of Environment Minister Jim Bradley, decided to adopt the Blue Box program as the model for municipal recycling across the province.
- Ontario Multi-Material Recycling Inc. (OMMRI) was created by the soft drink industry to help fund the new Blue Box system; and joint industry and government funding enabled the program to grow across Ontario.
- Nyle Ludolph was ‘borrowed’ by OMMRI, from Laidlaw, to assist communities across Ontario to launch their own programs.
- Derek Stephenson at RIS (with existing partner Art Mercer and new partner Geoff Love), and Jack McGinnis (now working independently), would eventually take the Blue Box program to cities across Canada, the U.S. and other parts of the globe. [8]

As a result of these developments, “the Ontario Blue Box [became] the most comprehensive curbside recycling system in the world.”[9] And in 1989, the United Nations Environment Programme gave the Ontario Government, Industry (OMMRI, Laidlaw, RIS, et al) and the Recycling Council of Ontario a joint award for “distinguished leadership” and “demonstrating cooperation in action” for the Blue Box program and their accomplishments in municipal recycling.

(For a more comprehensive description of these and other steps which led to the growth of the Blue Box, please see Dianne Humphries’ report.)



A Sea Change in Recycling

Looking back, each of these steps was significant in changing the state of recycling in Ontario and elsewhere. But perhaps the most important change was that the *negative feedback loop*, which had previously existed for municipal recycling, had ***now been turned around***.

Instead of blaming each other for inaction, government, industry and the public were now heading in the same, positive direction. Waste management companies and municipalities were creating new collection programs. Money was being made available to provide householders with boxes, bags or bins for collecting materials. Residents started participating consistently in local recycling programs, and in large numbers. Government and industry began cooperating to share the costs of managing wastes. Manufacturers, now able to get a reliable stream of good quality materials, started using larger quantities of recyclable materials. And new industrial facilities to recycle those materials were now being launched.

Growing on the Blue Box, other people came along to start similar programs – such as the Grey Box for paper fibres, coloured bags for curbside collection, blue bags for apartment collections, and the Green Bin for compostable materials. Then came larger household Blue Bins, Green Bins and more. Every step was important in growing recycling and taking it in new directions. And without each one, the state of recycling would not be where it is today.

It’s also important to recognize that **not all developments were entirely positive** or desirable. For example:

- for those of us who wanted a refillable soft drink container & deposit system across Ontario, the replacement of refillables by single-use containers was a big disappointment. It may also have been a mistake, as recovery rates for containers in areas with deposit systems are now much higher.
- The current lack of comprehensive plastics recycling, at a time when plastic has become the most pervasive element of the waste stream, suggests that this industry has not taken full responsibility for the wastes it generates.
- The mixing (or co-mingling) of recyclable materials for collection – and the resulting contamination of recyclable materials in many municipalities today – has led to a significant problem, as markets are demanding cleaner materials.
- The cost of collecting + sorting of recyclables has grown way more than expected.

Perhaps most of all, ***seeing the Blue Box as “the answer” to waste*** – rather than as a stepping stone towards larger solutions – ***has held back government, industry and the public*** from taking the next new bold steps that are needed.

With that said, the Blue Box program has still led to a “sea change” in waste management over the past 40 years. It has contributed to millions of tonnes of materials being recovered and recycled; significant reductions in industrial energy and virgin material usage; and the creation of thousands of jobs. Recycling is now seen as an essential part of waste management in almost all municipalities. Industry is now sharing responsibility for the creation and recovery of wastes, through EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) programs. And citizens across the country and worldwide now see recycling as an important part of what they can do to improve the environment.

All of this is still not enough to “solve” our waste problems. Many more steps, like the development of a circular economy, will be required.** Yet we have all taken a huge step in the right direction. The Blue Box (and the many subsequent programs) helped shift the prevailing public belief that ‘there’s nothing we can do to create change.’ Industries are now thinking into how to recycle *and* reduce the generation of waste. And the idea that each of us “can make a difference” is now firmly embedded in the thinking of people around the globe.

(**More on the circular economy here: EllenMacArthurfoundation.org, and Canada.ca.)

Insights from the Blue Box for the Future of Waste Management... and Societal Change

[Note: The following personal comments come from having helped create that first test program, and as an active participant in creating change since then; but not in growing the Blue Box across its lifetime. I leave those insights to the people who were part of that!]

It’s great to share past successes and remember anniversaries. This is an important part of remembering the progress we’ve made. But the real reason for writing this is my hope – that something *we* learned will help *others* who want to create positive change in our world.

As we look ahead... to reducing, reusing and recycling more wastes... growing stewardship, sustainability and the circular economy... and taking on other environmental and societal challenges... here are some core elements and learnings from the first Blue Box program that may be useful:

- 1) From the outset, we tried to ‘*initiate the change we wanted to see in the world*’ (to paraphrase Gandhi’s language), rather than wait for others to do it.
- 2) Our goal wasn’t to start just one recycling program. We wanted to create a model for sustainable recycling anywhere, and break the ‘cycle of inaction’ which was holding us all back.
- 3) In creating the Blue Box, we needed to ***change some of our own core beliefs*** for the program to get off the ground and succeed. This included:
 - Nyle Ludolph’s willingness to shift his thinking about recycling (after hearing what Jack McGinnis had accomplished in Toronto); then trying it at home with his family, and wondering what might be possible on a municipal scale;
 - Ron Murray’s belief that his company should make money from ‘doing something more’ than just picking up garbage, and his willingness to fund the test program; and
 - our shift (at RIS) from seeing community-based recycling as the ‘right and only way’, and become willing to work with corporate waste collectors.

4) These shifts allowed us to work with people across all sectors – non-profit, business and government – and collaborate with non-traditional partners. *Our shared goal became more important than our differences in belief and perspective.*

5) We also wanted to create a win-win-win – environmentally, economically, socially. And to grow a sustainable program + system for everyone involved: the public, the city, waste collectors, manufacturers, government at all levels, and our own company.

6) In Kitchener, our approach wasn't to *push, convince, or force* people to recycle. It was to:

- share what we loved and cared about;
- find others with shared values, and develop a common vision;
- invite people to take part by talking about what was important to them;
- engage + support them through useful information and feedback; and
- demonstrate that what we believed was actually possible.

7) We believed that people *wanted* to do something to help the environment, but needed personal encouragement and practical ways to do that. Thus our communications program, based on “You can make a difference”, was about helping people *believe in the power of their own choices and actions*, and their ability to create a better world. Our hope was that they would turn this into action, through recycling in their community.

8) Finally, we saw others as *partners* in the whole process. Rather than trying to convince them how to act, our focus was on “**thinking into**” how we could serve their needs. Thus the test program was designed to meet the interests of the public, Laidlaw/Superior, the City of Kitchener, and other communities as well.

So why do I share those particular points? Today we live in an age of polarization, when opposing groups and people are barely able to listen to one another, let alone find ways to cooperate and collaborate. We're also seeing a huge backlash against regulation and 'control'. People everywhere just don't want to be told what to do.

As a result, new approaches to change can't just rely on having 'good answers to problems' and telling others to act on them. We need to demonstrate them first. Then implement them in ways that connect people, rather than divide. That speak to other people's real needs, not just our own. And with sensitivity to their beliefs and values, as well as our own.

Perhaps some of these approaches, used to create the Blue Box, can help us 'move beyond' some of our divides – because it's now human willingness that is holding back change.

And the Results...

As described in the first section of this report, these kinds of steps helped create a *foundation* for success of the Blue Box program, which then led to:

- participation rates of over 85% in Kitchener, with both public + municipal support;
- why it was chosen as the model for municipal recycling across Ontario, and later recognized by the United Nations for environmental leadership and cross-sectoral collaboration; and
- its becoming a “blueprint for recycling programs in more than 150 countries” [10].

Since then, the Blue Box has even become a symbol of recycling. It has influenced the colour & shape of recycling containers being sold by retailers, and those used in homes and offices which collect recyclable materials. And it is now frequently seen in TV, films and other media.

What’s more, the idea of “***you can make a difference***” – that people *can* contribute to positive change through their choices and actions – grew with the Blue Box as it spread to other cities. And this type of thinking and language has now become part of our way of life.

For me, it is the last of these points that is perhaps the most significant of all our outcomes. More than making the Blue Box a success, or even having recycling grow dramatically (regardless of whether people used blue containers), the program helped grow a ‘consciousness of empowerment’ among people in many places. And that was the core premise behind our very first program.

We believed that people had a deep desire to improve the environment and our world. Recycling was simply a starting point, one way of contributing to this change. And “You can make a difference” was the language we found to encourage and support that.

Since 1981, *this idea* has grown even larger than the Blue Box or recycling. “We can make a difference” is now a statement of belief and action for thousands of groups, events, projects and programs around the globe. And millions of people – from health, social and environmental advocates to businesses, governments and Presidents of countries – have now used this language to express their desire to make the world a better place.

We didn’t create that; we just helped catalyze it. By expressing our beliefs and values, and trusting others felt that way too, we helped support an often unspoken voice within all of us. And as that consciousness and voice continues to grow, it inspires people everywhere to make positive contributions in their own unique and powerful ways.

Where ***that*** will lead us, no one knows... but I am deeply optimistic about the future.

Eric Hellman
September 2021

Footnotes:

[1] Stewardship Ontario website: <https://stewardshipontario.ca/download/the-story-of-ontarios-blue-box/>.

[2] *We Recycle: The Creators of the Blue Box*, by Dianne N. Humphries, for Pollution Probe, Toronto, July 1997.

[3] Personal communication with Wendy Cook, 2019.

[4] *On why I left the RIS and recycling*: This ‘deeper’ work is about finding ways to be more effective in creating change; and creating a “consciousness shift” in society by shifting ***how*** we make change. More on this work here: www.consciouschange.info.

[5][6][7][8][9] *We Recycle: The Creators of the Blue Box*, by Dianne N. Humphries (as above). (And personal knowledge of the author.)

[10] Stewardship Ontario (see [1]).