

Waste Reduction and Recovery Program Expansion

Hon. J. Michael Miltenberger

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Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Speaker, reducing our consumption, reusing materials and recycling waste products are ways that we can all help reduce our impact on the environment. When we do this, we use fewer natural resources and less energy, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions and saves money.

Given the opportunity, NWT residents willingly reduce consumption and participate in recycling programs. This is evident in our highly successful Beverage Container Program, with over 100 million containers returned to date. While we have had some successes, residents are looking to the Government of the Northwest Territories to play a leadership role in expanding this popular program.

In 2008, ENR consulted NWT residents, aboriginal organizations, environmental organizations and government to prioritize products for inclusion in the Waste Reduction and Recovery Program. Items under review included paper products, milk containers, e-waste, lead acid batteries, plastic grocery bags, fuel drums and tires. Residents identified paper and cardboard as the number one waste item for recovery or recycling. Recommendations also included the addition of milk containers as the next logical step for recycling in the NWT. Concerns about the number of plastic bags around communities, on the land, and going into our landfills were also received.

Mr. Speaker, it is a known fact that paper-based materials make up the largest portion of the waste stream. Some communities collect paper-based materials for shipment to southern Canada for recycling. However, current methods of transportation are energy-intensive and expensive; decreasing the environmental and economic benefits of recycling when these bulky materials are shipped long distances.

As a result, ENR continues to look for ways to reuse or recycle waste paper and cardboard right here in the North. A three-year initiative providing financial assistance to NWT-based municipalities, organizations, businesses and individuals to initiate and develop alternate ways to reuse paper and cardboard destined for landfills began last spring. This is the second year that financial assistance is being made available for the development of innovative, alternative and progressive methods of recycling paper products.

Through our Single-use Retail Bag Program that began on January 15, 2010, NWT grocery stores now charge a 25 cent environmental fee for every paper and/or plastic bag that they distribute. This environmental fee will help reduce our use of these products and extend the life of our community landfills. This initiative is part of a larger, two-year plan to phase-out all paper and plastic bags in the NWT, eliminating an estimated nine million single use retail bags from our landfills each and every year.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to announce that beginning today, milk containers are included as part of the NWT Beverage Container Program. All milk and liquid milk products, including milk jugs and milk substitute cartons, yogurt drink bottles, condensed and evaporated milk cans, UHT boxes and creamer bottles will be accepted at all NWT bottle depots. Residents will receive a 25 cent return on clean and rinsed milk containers of two or more litres and a 10 cent return on milk containers of one litre or less. The addition of milk containers in the Beverage Container Program will further reduce the volume of waste that goes to landfills and litter in our communities.

Money raised through the Beverage Container Program and the Bag Fee Program goes into the environment fund. This fund is used to cover program expenses and improve waste reduction and recovery programs, including our planned expansion into e-waste.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that waste reduction and recycling is important to the people of the Northwest Territories. Expanding the Waste Reduction and Recovery Program will maintain and improve the quality of our environment as well as significantly extend the lives of local landfills. Mahsi cho.