

Solid Waste Management in Nunavut: A Background

Waste Issues in Nunavut


As Nunavut continues to grow, our waste management systems are struggling to keep up. It is becoming more and more difficult to ensure that human activity within communities and on the land do not pose a significant threat to the natural environment. A major priority of the Nunavut Department of Environment (DOE) and the Department of Community and Government Services (C&GS) is to work in partnership with communities to improve our ability to effectively manage solid waste, and to prevent pollution in the unique and fragile environment on which we all rely.

A preliminary analysis has identified the following main priority areas for solid waste management and pollution control in Nunavut:

- **Updating landfill infrastructure and solid waste management practices.** In most communities, landfill operators are struggling to manage waste volume, and often rely on the practice of open burning to manage municipal waste. A number of upgrades are needed, including landfill operator training, infrastructure improvements and other updates yet to be identified.
- **Diverting and properly managing household and industrial hazardous waste.** Hazardous waste can be loosely defined as a material that, because of its chemical properties, poses a risk to the environment, to wildlife, to plants and to humans if allowed to be indiscriminately discharged into the environment. Hazardous wastes include but are not restricted to, common items such as paint, paint thinners, waste oil, waste laboratory chemicals, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, automobile batteries and waste from industrial operations,
- **Pollution Prevention.** Preventing pollution incidents is not only preferable but less expensive and easier than responding to them after the fact. DOE has embarked on several aggressive pollution prevention programs such as the Heating Oil Tank Inspection Program. Nunavut's vast geographic area and limited resources make the prevention of environmental incidents of paramount importance. Responding to pollution incidents after they have occurred can be a very risky and costly way to protect and manage our environment.
- **Public awareness and engagement for litter prevention.** Improper methods of waste disposal on the land and in communities continues to pose challenges in Nunavut. A key priority is to support and encourage Nunavummiut to promote anti-littering behaviour, which will be addressed through DOE's anti-littering program.

Recycling in Nunavut

In 2007, the Department of Environment launched three Pilot Recycling Projects in the communities of Iqaluit, Kugluktuk, and Rankin Inlet. These projects were undertaken to determine the feasibility of operating a beverage container recycling program across Nunavut. The pilot recycling programs are scheduled to end in December, 2010. The Government of Nunavut will not be extending the pilot programs or expanding the beverage container recycling programs at this time.



A Final Evaluation report of the recycling pilot programs was completed in March, 2010. Some of the key findings are summarized below:

- Recycling of beverage containers diverts a maximum of 2-3% of the waste stream from the landfill. Therefore, recycling would not significantly contribute to waste volume reduction.
- Beverage containers are made of essentially inert materials, meaning that they do not pose a significant pollution or contamination concern.
- Establishing recycling in all Nunavut communities would be extremely expensive: roughly \$18.2 million to start, plus annual ongoing operating and maintenance costs.

In summary, at the present time, the costs of recycling outweigh the benefits. Recycling does not provide an effective means to address the main waste management priority areas identified previously.

Planning for Effective Solid Waste Management

The recycling pilot programs were beneficial in that they compelled the Department of Environment and the Department of Community and Government Services to examine the solid waste management system in Nunavut as a whole. Moving forward, the Government of Nunavut, in partnership with other territorial stakeholders, plans to focus its limited resources on a number of targeted initiatives, for example:

- Department of Community and Government Services, in partnership with the Department of Environment, will lead the development of a Nunavut-wide Solid Waste Management Strategy whose purpose is to evaluate all aspects of how Nunavummiut dispose of unwanted items, and to develop a unique strategy that best fits each type of waste. The research leading up to the strategy will carefully examine solid waste from a long-term cost and benefit viewpoint. The focus will be on such issues as available land, fencing, environmental concerns, recycling, re-use, segregation, sequestration, composting, back-hauling, and various types of incineration technologies to determine what is of best value to us in Nunavut.
- Development and delivery of a hazardous waste management training program for landfill operators in partnership with the Municipal Training Organization
- Department of Environment will lead a Nunavut-wide anti-littering public awareness and education campaign

For More Information:

Evaluation of Recycling Pilot Projects Report

Prepared by Dillon Consulting Limited, Available at <http://env.gov.nu.ca/programareas/environmentprotection/resources>

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Share your thoughts!

We welcome input from all Nunavummiut pertaining to solid waste management in Nunavut.

To share your thoughts or ask a question, please contact us at environment@gov.nu.ca.