

Metroland

Green, blue or black -- sorting out garbage

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By Erin Hatfield

DURHAM -- The Region boasts a more than 50 per cent waste diversion rate, but some residents are still confused about what goes where.

Durham operates green bin, blue box and black bag systems, but waste doesn't always end up in the correct place and, as a result, more residents are seeing their waste left curbside.

"The materials have not changed," explained Katherine Ross-Perron, a waste technician with the Region. "We have always had our standard list of materials."

But, when the new waste collection contract started on July 1, she said things became a bit stricter. Sometimes drivers will pick up the unacceptable material, but Ms. Ross-Perron said it ends up in the garbage in the end.

"Once it gets to the curb it is up to the driver to sort through the boxes and put the right material within the truck," she said. "Often a lot of the drivers will take material as a courtesy to the resident, but it is actually disposed of at the end of the day."

According to Ms. Ross-Perron, there are some commonly misplaced items. Take-out coffee cups originally were acceptable in the green bin, but it was discovered that the liner is in fact plastic and it wasn't breaking down in the compost stream so now they go in the garbage. Egg cartons, plant pots and plastic jugs over 10 litres, often end up in the blue box, but are not recyclable. Also plastic containers, like the kind muffins, berries and takeout food come in, are not acceptable in the blue box stream.

"The best solution is to avoid buying products that contain these poly-styrene material, but if that is impossible, we do encourage residents to put it in the garbage stream," she said.

Some of the stranger misplaced items include shoes, plastic toys, pots and pans, drinking glasses and even pool covers.

Plastic bags formerly would have gone in the garbage, but a partnership in diversion between the Region and retailers now enables residents to take bags back to a number stores in the region.

"But, always the best option is to use reusable bags," Ms. Ross-Perron said.

Perhaps one of the most confusing aspects of the Region's waste management program is which bags should residents use in the green bin.

"In order to get the high quality compost we are getting from our residents we have no plastic in the green bin," Ms. Ross-Perron explained. "That is why we have introduced our program with the biodegradable liner bags and we encourage residents to look for the certifications on the boxes to purchase the correct liner bags."

Getting the message out that residents need to use 100-per cent compostable bags has always been a challenge and it is something the Region is still battling. Even though Toronto and other nearby municipalities will accept plastic bags in their compost stream, the use of a plastic bag in Durham will result in the green bin being left on the curb with a rejection sticker on it.

"Even though some bags say they are a recycling green bag, they are made from plastic," Ms. Ross-Perron said. "Technically they are not lying when they advertise on the box that it is for kitchen organics because residents in areas like Toronto can use those bags, but in Durham Region we do not want to see these bags within our compostable stream."

She said the Region is trying to get shelf talker in stores so when residents are at their point of purchase, they see the sign, 'acceptable in Durham Region' indicating the correct bags to purchase.