

Waste collection changes coming

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Durham Region has aggressive plans to hit a 70 per cent waste-diversion target, including introducing clear plastic garbage bags and reducing bag limits.

The 70-per cent target, by 2010, was adopted by council in January. The regional average for 2007 is 53 per cent, while Brock Township's diversion rate is 41 per cent -- the lowest in Durham Region.

"It's not going to be easy, we're going to have to use every trick in the book to get there," said Cliff Curtis, Durham's commissioner of works, at a committee meeting last Wednesday.

Plans to increase diversion include reducing the amount of garbage bag residents can put out at the curb.

In the north Durham municipalities of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge, there is currently weekly pick-up of three bags a week. Additional bags require tags.

That will change in April 2009 when there will be a four-garbage bag limit every two weeks, with recycling and green bin pick-up each week.

However, the works committee could opt to move that limit to three bags, with a further decrease to two bags every two weeks in January of 2010.

As well, the Region is looking at requiring clear bags for garbage, starting in October 2008. Mr. Curtis said Nova Scotia saw a 30 per cent jump in the amount of waste diverted from landfills after switching to clear bags.

"This is quite a significant way to increase recycling and diversion, but it won't be popular with a lot of people."

"How would a homeowner handle those personal items that get thrown out? You know what I'm talking about," asked Whitby Councillor Gerry Emm.

Mr. Curtis responded that one opaque grocery bag would be allowed in the clear bag. As well, people with medical conditions could ask for tags and use regular bags.

Other plans include adopting a region-wide uniform property tax rate for waste. Each municipality now pays for the costs in their own municipality, though the overall system is administered by the Region. In the 2008 budget, some municipalities like Brock Township -- at \$7 for the average homeowner -- will see increases in the waste portion of their tax bill and some, like Scugog, will see decreases.

The Region will also look at preparing a bylaw that would allow them to penalize those who don't follow the Region's waste rules and would also curb scavengers who remove valuable material from blue boxes.

With notes from Scott Howard.