

Recycling of Hot Drink Paper Cups

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To:	Public Works and Infrastructure Committee
From:	Geoff Rathbone, General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide information on the recyclability of hot drink paper cups.

The City's In-Store Packaging Waste Diversion Working Group is currently examining in-store retail and food service packaging, including hot drink paper cups, and staff will be submitting a report to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee in January 2008 on a recommended strategy for this material.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services recommends that:

1. hot drink paper cups not be added as an acceptable item in the City of Toronto recycling or Green Bin program at this time due to concerns of contamination as outlined in this report and that staff report back on this issue as part of the report of the In-Store Packaging Waste Diversion Working Group in early 2008.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting held on June 19, 20 and 22, 2007, in considering EX9.1 “Proposed Initiatives and Financing Model to Get to 70% Diversion by 2010”, Council directed that the General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services report on “What prevents the City of Toronto from recycling wax-lined cups when tetra-pak containers are accepted, and why Hamilton and Windsor are able to do so”.

COMMENTS

Hot drink paper cups such as those used for coffee are typically made of wet-strength paper fibre with a polyethylene coating, commonly referred to as polycoat. Hot drink paper cups are therefore similar to and potentially compatible with the polycoat milk and juice cartons that are already included in Toronto’s recycling program. Polycoat material is, however, a contaminant if it ends up in any of the other fibre streams because the other fibre streams have pulping processes which cannot deal with wet strength fibre and the “poly” coating. The polystyrene plastic lids, which are often attached, are also a contaminant, as are stir sticks and any liquid residue such as coffee.

Hamilton

Hot drink paper cups are not included in Hamilton’s blue box program. In fact, coffee cups are included on Hamilton’s list of “what stays out” of the blue box. Hamilton does include “paper napkins/plates/cups” in its Green Bin program but does not allow plastic lids (or plastics of any kind). The fibre portion of the cups is composted and the polyethylene lining is a contaminant. “What goes in” and “what stays out” lists for Hamilton’s blue box and green bin programs can be viewed on the website addresses in Appendix 1.

Windsor

Although it has been reported that hot drink paper cups are accepted to the City of Windsor’s blue box program, drink cups are not included in the list of materials deemed acceptable in Essex-Windsor’s blue box program. In fact, the recycling information sheet on Essex-Windsor’s web site states that “milk cartons/juice cartons are NOT recyclable” ...because the lining...“can not be separated from the paper therefore it is excluded from our recycling program”. A logical extension would be that other polycoat materials such as paper drink cups are also excluded. Essex-Windsor’s promotional material can be viewed at the website address in Appendix 1.

Toronto

The City of Toronto has an extensive litter/recycling bin program which complements its residential Blue Box program and allows pedestrians to recycle “on the go”. If the City were to include paper coffee and soft drink cups in its program, the majority of these cups would be recovered from the litter/recycling bins. Even with an extensive education program it would be very difficult to ensure that pedestrians removed the lids before placing the cups in the recycling compartment of the bins. Furthermore, our material recovery facilities (MRF’s) were not designed to sort paper drink cups so it is likely that some of the cups and/or lids would end up in our other fibre streams, possibly in such quantities that the mills would reject or downgrade our fibre loads.

The onus should be on the producers of hot drink paper cups to minimize the amount of packaging used and to make their packaging compatible with municipal recycling programs. If the lids were made of similar material to the cups, we could enter into discussions with our processing contractors and recycling end markets to determine the feasibility of adding paper drink cups to our blue box program.

While Toronto does not promote the inclusion of paper coffee cups in the Green Bin program, some paper drink cups without lids are received from residential sources. There are, however, limits to the amount of paper fibre that can be processed with Green Bin organics. Because of this, and the fact that plastic lids are a difficult contaminant to manage, Toronto does not accept paper drink cups in our commercial Green Bin program.

In addition, recycling of paper drink cups would be preferred to composting because:

- the fibre in the cups could be recycled more than once but composted only once;
- the cost, net of revenue, to recycle cups is less than the cost to compost them; and
- there is industry funding for Blue Box materials through Waste Diversion Ontario but not for Green Bin materials.

If the issue of the polystyrene lid on hot drink paper cups can be resolved, the City could initiate discussions with our two recycling processing contractors and with our polycoat end market to determine if and when hot drink paper cups could be added to our Blue Box program.

We are currently exploring the City's powers under the new City of Toronto Act to determine whether we can influence the design and distribution of in-store retail and food service packaging through taxes, bans or other legislation. The City's In-Store Packaging Waste Diversion Working Group which includes Councillors, staff and representatives from the retail and food industry is meeting regularly and discussing reduction and recovery options, including deposit return and take-it back programs. A report recommending the City's preferred system for managing in-store retail and food service packaging, including hot drink paper cups, will be submitted to the Public Works and Infrastructure Committee in January 2008.

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SIGNATURE

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Appendix 1

Recycling Website Addresses

Hamilton:

<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/WasteManagement/ProgramsAndServices/BlueboxRecycling/>

<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/WasteManagement/ProgramsAndServices/BlueboxRecycling/WhatGoesIn.htm>

<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/WasteManagement/ProgramsAndServices/BlueboxRecycling/WhatStaysOut.htm>

<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/WasteManagement/ProgramsAndServices/GreenCartComposting/>

<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/WasteManagement/ProgramsAndServices/GreenCartComposting/WhatGoesIn.htm>

<http://www.myhamilton.ca/myhamilton/CityandGovernment/CityDepartments/PublicWorks/WasteManagement/ProgramsAndServices/GreenCartComposting/WhatStaysOut.htm>

Windsor:

<http://www.ewswa.org/pages/recycle/basics.html>