

# **Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility: Post-Transition Communications Strategy**

**Date:** September 11, 2025

**To:** Infrastructure and Environment Committee

**From:** General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, Chief Communications Officer, Strategic Public & Employee Relations

**Wards:** All

## **SUMMARY**

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The purpose of this staff report is to provide Infrastructure and Environment Committee with an overview of Solid Waste Management Services and Strategic Public and Employee Communications' strategy to communicate Blue Box Program changes to residents and other City of Toronto waste customers before and after the full operational transition to Extended Producer Responsibility beginning on January 1, 2026.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The General Manager of Solid Waste Management Services and the Chief Communications Officer recommend that the Infrastructure and Environment Committee receive the report for information.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

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There are no financial impacts resulting from adoption of this report.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

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At its meeting on July 23 and 24, 2025, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee adopted item IE23.2 titled "Joint Collection Schedule Discussions with Circular

Materials". Among other decisions, the Committee directed the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to report back to the September 26, 2025 Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting on the following:

- a. Key messages for the shift of the Blue Box program away from the City collection including clear public messaging for City Councillors on the shift of the Blue Box program away from City collection;
- b. Planned advertising venues and earned media related to the shift of the Blue Box program away from City collection;
- c. A clear plan for what would happen when bins are left uncollected in January 2026, and snow storm contingency for collection;
- d. A possible pilot looking for Blue Box contamination earlier than January 1, 2026; and
- e. A clear communication plan for first 3 months of January 2026 that explains the changes in the Blue Box program and why this has happened.

The City Council Decision document can be viewed at:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE23.2>

At its meeting on April 23 and 24, 2025, City Council adopted item IE20.5 titled "Transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility: Post-Transition Update". Amongst other decisions, City Council directed the General Manager, Solid Waste Management Services, to create a Customer Care team to support collection operations and customer care needs following the transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility.

The City Council Decision document can be viewed at:

<https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2025.IE20.5>

## COMMENTS

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### Background

As result of the Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016, and O. Reg. 391/21: Blue Box, management of Blue Box Materials (also referred to as recycling) from eligible sources<sup>1</sup> (including low-rise residential properties, City-serviced multi-rise residential properties, schools and long-term care facilities) is now a producer-administered and provincially regulated program, distinct from Green Bin organics and garbage collection that the City still administers and regulates through by-laws. Circular Materials is a Producer Responsibility Organization (or "PRO") and the provincial recycling program administrator, acting on behalf of all PROs and their producer

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<sup>1</sup> The City will continue to provide Blue Bin Recycling collection to non-eligible sources such as small commercial businesses, charities, institutions, religious organizations, and City agencies and divisions.

members, to ensure that Blue Box Materials from eligible sources in Ontario is managed per their obligations outlined in O. Reg. 391/21: Blue Box.

The City was contracted by Circular Materials to provide recycling collection, receipt, transfer, haulage, customer service, and promotion and education services during the transition to Extended Producer Responsibility from July 1, 2023 until December 31, 2025. As of January 1, 2026, producers of recyclable materials will become fully responsible for the management of all Blue Box Materials from eligible sources across Ontario.

### **Why Extended Producer Responsibility is Important**

The transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility is a monumental shift in how recycling services are delivered to residents and how recyclables are managed in Ontario. The Regulation transitions the Blue Box Program<sup>2</sup> from a Shared Industry Funding Model (joint municipal and producer responsibility) to a full Extended Producer Responsibility model. This transition shifted the operational and full financial responsibility for the management of post-consumer Blue Box Materials from eligible sources<sup>3</sup> to the producers of paper, packaging, and packaging-like products. Residents will need to adjust to the fundamental change that recycling service provision will shift from the City to producers.

The transition of the Blue Box Program to Extended Producer Responsibility is a positive change, which City staff have long advocated for due to several benefits, including, but not limited to:

- Standardization of what is accepted in the Blue Box across the province as of 2026 when producers have fully taken over recycling
- Potential for increased waste diversion from landfill once recovery targets come into effect in 2026 and onwards
- Potential reduction and/or innovation in packaging

### **Producer Responsibility for Promotion and Education**

Following the expiration of the City's Transition Agreement with Circular Materials on December 31, 2025, from 2026 onwards, Circular Materials is legally responsible for developing and circulating printed recycling collection information annually, including, among other requirements, the dates on which collection will occur for residential households and other eligible sources.

According to the Regulation, producers' must include the following in their promotion and education program:

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<sup>2</sup> The provincial recycling program is called the "Blue Box Program" whereas Toronto's program is called the "Blue Bin Program."

<sup>3</sup> Includes single-family households, multi-residential buildings, schools, long-term care facilities and retirement residences.

- A list of Blue Box Materials that can *and* cannot be placed in blue box receptacles
- How blue boxes can be replaced, or how additional blue boxes can be requested
- The dates on which collection will occur
- A telephone number and email address for residents to ask collection-related questions, request additional or new blue boxes, and address any storage-related or blue box capacity concerns

Producer-led promotion and education programs must also be provided on a publicly accessible website and in print, delivered by mail to each eligible source at least once per year. Program details should be provided in English and in French. On June 4, 2025, the Province of Ontario posted proposed "Amendments to the Blue Box Regulation" to the Environmental Registry of Ontario (posting number [025-0009](#)), which included potential amendments to "provide flexibility on printed promotion and education materials" by requiring "producers to provide promotion and education materials in print only where requested by a municipality or resident". The initial regulatory requirement was for promotion and education programs to be provided in print and mailed to eligible sources each year.

On September 4, 2025, the Province released its decision on the Blue Box Regulation amendments. The proposed amendment regarding printed promotion and education materials (noted above) is moving forward. If requested by a resident or municipality, promotion and education materials will be delivered to eligible sources in print, free of charge, and available only once in a calendar year.

Staff will provide a full analysis of all the remaining amendments and their impacts on the Division's operations in a staff report to the Infrastructure and Environment Committee meeting on October 29, 2025.

## **Post-Transition Communications Strategy**

To ensure Toronto residents experience a seamless transition of the Blue Box Program to producers, Strategic Public and Employee Communications, in consultation with Solid Waste Management Services, have developed a clear and comprehensive communications plan to ensure residents and other waste collection customers are aware and understand the impacts of the upcoming legislated recycling program changes. It will be critical that residents understand that recycling collection service, including customer support, for them and other eligible sources, will be managed by a private company contracted on behalf of the producers by Circular Materials (the Common Collection System Administrator for Ontario)<sup>4</sup>, not the City.

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<sup>4</sup> Circular Materials is also a Producer Responsibility Organization representing the interests and discharging the regulatory responsibilities of their member producers. [www.circularmaterials.ca](http://www.circularmaterials.ca)

Communications tactics<sup>5</sup> related to the rebranding of City-owned residential Blue Bins began in May 2025 to advise residents that a sticker will be applied to their Blue Bin(s). Further communications and outreach by the City is underway and will continue throughout 2025 and until the end of Q1 2026. Tactics and timing will vary depending on the program information and any action required for the target audience (eligible sources). The communications plan will evolve based on the needs of residents and Members of Council.

### **Support for Councillors Communicating with Residents**

With the understanding that residents may contact their Councillor with questions regarding the transition, staff are preparing a comprehensive toolkit for Councillors that will include resources to assist with both proactively engaging and responding to inquiries from constituents.

#### *Key Messages on Changes*

While the City does not have a legislated role in communicating Blue Box Program operational details to eligible sources, it will continue to work with Circular Materials to ensure Toronto residents are aware of program operations.

Key messages related, but not limited, to the following questions will be provided to Councillors:

- Why is the Blue Box Program changing (explanation of the provincial legislative changes)?
- What is Extended Producer Responsibility?
- Who are Circular Materials/producers?
- What role will the City have in the management of Blue Box Materials?
- Who is impacted by the changes?
- What impacts will residents see at the curb?
- Who should residents contact for program questions or collection issues?
- What do residents need to do differently?
- How will the program operate under producers?
- Are there any changes in the list of acceptable materials?

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<sup>5</sup> Communications tactics included mailed postcard, web content, social media, and Councillor communications.

Please see Table 1 below for a high-level summary of the recycling details that will remain the same or change as of January 1, 2026.

Table 1: Summary of Recycling Program Changes

Item	Post January 1, 2026
Recycling Bin(s)	Customers retain recycling bin(s). Logo and contact info will/have been updated to Circular Materials.
Recycling Collection Day	No change for the majority of locations. Some households will experience a material change. <sup>6</sup>
Recycling Collection Time	Collection routes used by producers may result in a collection time change <sup>7</sup>
Types of Materials Collected	Same materials, plus additional materials will be accepted (e.g. black plastic)
Collection Truck	A separate truck may be used to collect recycling only
Missed Collection	Contact Circular Materials 1-888-921-2686 <a href="http://www.circularmaterials.ca/toronto">www.circularmaterials.ca/toronto</a>
New Bin/Bin Exchange/Bin Repair	
Recycling Questions	
All Blue Box Program information (e.g. contamination reduction, collection in inclement weather, etc.)	Communicated by Circular Materials

Staff will provide Councillors with sharable content for proactive outreach and education to their constituents through their websites, newsletters, social media channels, and email listservs.

### Planned Advertising and other Public Messaging Tactics

Solid Waste Management Services and Strategic Public and Employee Communications staff have been working closely with Circular Materials to ensure both parties are aware of all communication tactics to residents in Toronto. Staff will continue to work with Circular Materials to ensure the coordination, messaging and delivery of all communications and public education activities are consistent.

<sup>6</sup> For impacted households in Districts 2 and 3, recycling and garbage collection weeks will switch, but the collection day will remain the same.

<sup>7</sup> This is also the case for the collection of all material streams. The time of collection may change, but the collection day will remain the same.

## *Multilingual Public Education*

Staff have engaged the City's contracted advertising agency to develop a public education advertising campaign to inform residents of the upcoming recycling changes ahead of 2026. The campaign will include multiple languages and tactics including: print, radio; digital media (online ads); a dedicated web page on toronto.ca; paid and organic social media; out-of-home media (e.g. multi-residential elevator information screens, transit posters/screens, etc.); media relations; and direct mail to households and businesses.

A multi-faceted advertising campaign will maximize reach and accessibility for residents for whom English is not their first language. This campaign will be available in English, French and the City's top 10 languages according to Statistics Canada's 2021 census data, which is the most recent census data available.

This multi-channel approach will ensure transparency, encourage continued participation in all waste diversion programs and facilitate a smooth transition of the residential Blue Bin program to Extended Producer Responsibility in Toronto.

Communication tactics will be further informed, if required, by questions and feedback received from residents and staff and will continue to consider future opportunities to enhance the communications tactics through Q1 of 2026.

## *Promotion & Education Resources*

Every fall, Solid Waste Management Services mails a Waste Collection Schedule to all curbside collection customers and a Waste Management Guide to all residential customers. The 2026 version<sup>8</sup> of these materials will include messaging related to the upcoming changes to the recycling program. The Waste Collection Schedule is available in various languages and formats, as requested by residents.

Community outreach presentations and events attended by staff and 3Rs Ambassador volunteers provide another opportunity to engage with residents on the changes.

## *Communications Related to Uncollected Blue Bins*

City staff will work closely with Circular Materials to ensure clear public messaging of actions required for uncollected Blue Bins. This will be communicated through a variety of tactics, including, but not limited to: Councillor communications for residents, web content, scripts for 311 Customer Service Representatives, service alerts on Circular Materials' mobile application, etc.

- *Inclement Weather*

Circular Materials will be responsible to collect Blue Box Materials from eligible sources, regardless of weather conditions. Despite inclement weather (e.g. floods, snowstorms,

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<sup>8</sup> The 2025 Waste Management Guide included information related to the Blue Box Transition.

etc.), Circular Materials must collect Blue Box Materials. Collection may be delayed, but it must still occur.

- *Contamination*

At its meeting on July 10, 2025, the Infrastructure and Environment Committee directed staff to explore the possibility of undertaking a pilot looking for Blue Box contamination<sup>9</sup> ahead of the post-transition phase beginning on January 1, 2026. However, under provincial law, ownership of blue box material from eligible sources is solely the producers. The City, as a contractor hired to collect and transfer this material to processors on behalf of producers, does not have the ability to manage the material outside of its contract with Circular Materials.

The City will continue to work with Circular Materials to understand how contamination will be managed and communicated to residents beginning in 2026. When staff have a better understanding of Circular Materials plan, staff can assist in communicating that plan to residents.

### **Customer Service Support**

Although the City will not be responsible for the provision of residential recycling-related customer service support and the management of recyclable materials from eligible sources as of 2026, ensuring residents are well prepared and supported through the change is a top priority. Furthermore, in alignment with the goals of the City's [Long Term Waste Management Strategy](#) and [TransformTO Net Zero Strategy](#) for greenhouse gas reduction, the diversion of recyclable material from landfill is still of critical importance to the City.

Staff continue to work closely with the Customer Experience Division (311) to prepare for the anticipated influx of residential inquiries, leading up to and after January 2026, when the City is no longer managing recyclable materials from eligible sources.

With the authority granted to Solid Waste Management Services by City Council in April 2025 (Item 2025.IE20.5), the Division established a four (4) person Customer Care team to support collection operations and customer care needs in the post-transition phase, when the City is no longer providing eligible source recycling collection services. These staff will work closely with the Division's operations and community engagement staff, along with the Customer Experience Division (311) and the Strategic Public and Employee Communications Division, to ensure customer needs are being met by Circular Materials' recycling collection service provider.

This team will also provide ongoing administrative and analytical support regarding service request information, trends, and forecasts, while using that data to inform key messaging and communications to customers.

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<sup>9</sup> The presence of non-Blue Box Materials.

## **CONTACT**

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## **SIGNATURE**

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