



The Daily Gleaner

Energy Efficiency Also Includes the 3 R's – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

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We have all heard that being energy efficient in our home can save money and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). We know that we should switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs), and that we should turn down our air conditioner in the summer and our heat in the winter. So now let's get down and dirty: What about "waste efficiency"?

The fact is, if we separate our household waste by recycling and composting, we can significantly reduce the amount of solid waste being sent each week to the landfill. According to the Fredericton Region Solid Waste Commission (FRSWC), approximately 50% of our waste is organic, meaning food and other materials that can mostly be composted; 10% is plastic materials; 5 to 10% is metal materials; and the rest is mainly paper products. Is it possible to separate to the point of near-zero waste? Absolutely!

The first thing we can do is to be conscious consumers and be mindful of packaging. We must attempt to minimize the part we play in the "consumer culture" we live in, as most of the products we buy have excessive packaging that ends up in the landfill. Buying products with recyclable packaging is essential if we are to significantly reduce our community's waste. Clearly no packaging is ideal, however due to theft prevention and sanitation issues; this is not a choice for most manufacturers. So instead of packaging the product with tough-to-recycle plastics, we as consumers can enforce product stewardship by only buying packaging that is 100% post-consumer recyclable.

Plastic containers account for between six and seven thousand tons annually at the FRSWC. This is an enormous amount considering these materials can be reused over and over, and can then be recycled instead of thrown out. This is where community involvement comes in – you matter! I can only think of so many ways to reuse a plastic yogurt container, however if I were a painter or a builder, there would be endless uses for them. Perhaps there is a way our community can redistribute our containers to organizations and businesses that use them frequently – such as daycares, summer camps and after-school programs, painting and building enterprises, etc. Why not create a drop box for plastic containers in the same spirit as the plastic grocery bag drop box? And individually, we need to make sure we take our containers to the bulk food store and refill them as opposed to using new plastic bags and containers.

Now let's talk organic waste. When most people think of composting, their first thoughts are odors and bugs. However, this is not the case when done properly. Fredericton residents, the first thing you need to do is to go to the City of Fredericton Parks and Trees Division at 100 Two Nations Crossing (across from the new Walmart on Fredericton's

north side), and purchase a backyard composter for only \$25. You will receive a booklet on how to make compost, what to do and not to do. You will also need an 'under-kitchen-sink' compost container to collect your daily compost, and if desired, you can find biodegradable paper bags at several local grocery stores specifically for your kitchen compost container, so when it is full you can throw the entire bag into your backyard composter and it will break down along with your organic matter.

This message is clear: 'green matters' when it comes to our purchasing and waste disposal habits. Buy fewer products with non-recyclable packaging. Buy in bulk with reusable containers and bags. Save your clear plastic produce bags and reuse them at the grocery store. And if you haven't already, start something new - composting. Let us turn this consumer culture into a conservation culture and reduce our waste for the sake of our overfilling landfills!

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