

News Release: Embargoed until 11am, Wednesday, 7 July, 2004

RECYCLING AND COMPOSTING SAVES 31 MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR

What: Release of GPI Solid Waste-Resource Accounts

Where: The Bin Doctor Recycling Depot, 2651 Clifton St, near North and Robie

When: 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, 7 July 2004

(Halifax, 7 July 2004) Nova Scotia's leading edge solid waste management system saves at least \$31 million a year -- or \$33 for every Nova Scotian -- compared to the old landfill system, according to a new study released today.

The study, by Halifax-based non-profit research group GPI Atlantic, takes into account a full range of benefits and costs, including operating and capital costs for curbside pickups and landfilling, decreased greenhouse gas and air pollution emissions, new jobs in the recycling industry, time spent sorting waste, and costs of administering the bottle deposit-refund and tire recycling systems.

The biggest financial advantage of the new system over the old is in the energy saved by using recycled materials instead of materials extracted from virgin resources. The second largest financial benefit comes from extending the life-span of landfills by diverting nearly half of the province's solid waste to recycling and composting.

Compared to 1989, when only 3% of waste was diverted, Nova Scotia now diverts 46% of waste from landfills.

The study confirms Nova Scotia's national and international leadership in solid waste management, but is the first to look at the full costs and benefits of the system.

The \$31 million annual saving is the lowest estimate in the study. When higher estimates are used, the savings could be as high as \$167 million a year, or \$178 for every Nova Scotian.



New Jobs

The new system has created employment in the waste management industry valued at \$2.8- \$3.9 million a year, with spin-off benefits of \$3.7 to \$ 5 million.

When counting only operating and capital costs, the old landfill system appears to be cheaper, costing \$24 million a year less than the present system. But GPI Atlantic is constructing new measures of progress (the Genuine Progress Index) for Nova Scotia, and argues that the conventional accounting systems are deceptive because they exclude a wide range of social and environmental costs and benefits.

For instance, the old Sackville landfill was plagued by leachate problems, rodents and pests, foul odours, and leaked gas – producing environmental and health costs that don't show up in the conventional accounts. The situation became such a problem that Halifax Metropolitan Authority (which ran the landfill) compensated Sackville residents and affected individuals with \$10.4 million for “loss of quality of life and property values.” The GPI factors these sorts of costs into the equation.

The GPI report found that, on a per capita basis, Nova Scotia disposes of 39% less waste than the Canadian average, and that Halifax Regional Municipality has the highest waste diversion rate of any municipality in Canada – twice the average. Nova Scotia's overall waste diversion rate of 46% is also higher than any industrialised country. Nova Scotia's high diversion rate is due in large part to its composting system.

Within Nova Scotia in 2001, HRM and the Annapolis Valley had the highest total diversion rates at 59% and 51%, respectively, and Cape Breton had the lowest at 25%. Cape Breton is also the only place in Nova Scotia that still uses incineration to dispose of its garbage. Total diversion refers to the total of residential; commercial, industrial and institutional; and construction and demolition wastes.

Access to curbside recycling in Nova Scotia jumped from less than 5% in 1989 to 99% today, and 76% of residents now have access to curbside organics pickup – by far the highest rates in the country.

Representatives from all over Canada, as well as Japan, Hong Kong, China, Vietnam, Russia, Ireland, Guyana, the United States, Trinidad and several other countries have travelled to Nova Scotia to study how the province manages its waste. The GPI report records the money spent in Nova Scotia by these international delegations as a monetary benefit of the new system that is hidden in the standard way of counting system costs.



Slipping behind and further to go

The GPI report cautions that Nova Scotia and HRM cannot afford to rest on the laurels of their achievements if they want to maintain their leadership position in solid waste management. In fact, both the province and the municipality have been slipping.

Nova Scotia's total waste diversion rate declined from 50% in 2000 to 46% today; and residential diversion in HRM decreased from around 50% to 47%. "We've come a long way since the days we used to dump all our garbage into landfills," says the report's lead author, Dr. Sally Walker. "The challenge now is to avoid the complacency that may come with our achievement. We need to go a lot further."

The report points to the inadequacy of existing provincial systems for dealing with household hazardous waste and with the construction and demolition waste that makes up 25-30% of the waste stream. It also urges increased waste diversion in apartment buildings and businesses, and an expansion of the province's waste stewardship agreements with businesses.

The report notes that businesses can do a lot more to reduce waste. For example, the Sydney Olympics demonstrated that compostable coffee cups can be successfully used on a very large scale. In Nova Scotia, Irving Oil uses biodegradable coffee cups, although the lids are still plastic. But the biggest purveyors of coffee in Nova Scotia still do not use recyclable or compostable coffee cups.

In fact, a government-sponsored litter study found that Tim Hortons and McDonald's alone account for one-third of all litter in Nova Scotia – Tim Hortons for 22% and McDonald's for 10.1% of identifiable litter. Efforts by the NS Department of Environment and Labour to encourage Tim Hortons to use compostable or recyclable coffee cups are ongoing.

But if we really want to reduce waste further, says the GPI report, we need to reduce the amount of waste we generate in the first place – by re-examining our consumption habits and by reducing unnecessary packaging.

Full report available at www.gpiatlantic.org

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About GPI Atlantic

“We measure what we value.”

GPI Atlantic is a non-profit research organization committed to the development of the Genuine Progress Index (GPI) – a new measure of sustainability, wellbeing and quality of life.

The Genuine Progress Index is an alternative to the practice of equating progress with economic growth alone. The GPI links the economy with social and environmental variables to create a more comprehensive and accurate measurement tool.

The GPI, for example, treats pollution and crime as costs rather than gains to the economy. That might seem obvious, but pollution clean-up costs and the purchase of burglar alarms in response to crime waves actually contribute to “growth” in the Gross Domestic Product, our most common measure of progress. As well, the GPI assigns explicit value to health, security, volunteer work, environmental quality and other assets. By contrast, the GDP can grow even as poverty, insecurity, and inequality increase, while the gap between rich and poor widens, and while the earth’s resources are depleted.

Conventionally, progressive solid waste-resource management systems like Nova Scotia’s look costly because of the increased operating costs associated with extra curbside pickups and running the province’s recycling, composting, and advanced waste processing systems. But conventional accounting systems ignore a wide range of hidden benefits – like reduced greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions, extended landfill life, new jobs, and energy savings from recycling. They also ignore hidden costs, like the extra time it takes people to sort their waste, and the costs of operating the bottle refund, tire recycling, and stewardship programs. The GPI full-cost accounting methods can provide a more comprehensive assessment of true costs and benefits, and thereby help guide policy more effectively to improve social wellbeing.

Our core mission is the development of a demonstration index consisting of 22 components – of which solid waste-resource management is one – focusing on the province of Nova Scotia. This “full cost accounting” project will serve as a pilot project for Canada and other provinces.

Taken alone, each of the 22 GPI components addresses one vital aspect of our way of life. Taken together, the components provide a comprehensive management tool for use by politicians, policy makers, and community planners. The GPI can also provide the media and ordinary citizens with an easy-to-understand measure of the effectiveness of government in advancing our shared social values.

GPI Atlantic is a pioneer and leader in quality of life research. Established in 1997 by Ronald Colman, PhD, and supported by a distinguished group of academics and researchers, GPI Atlantic is not affiliated with any political party or interest group.