
Halifax Regional Council
August 20, 2002

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: Brian T. Smith
Brian T. Smith, Director of Solid Waste Resources

Date: August 13, 2002

SUBJECT: Beverage Container Caps and Milk Containers

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

Request by Councillor Brian Warshick at Regional Council meeting of June 11, 2002.

BACKGROUND

At the Regional Council meeting of June 11, 2002, Councillor Warshick requested a staff report on the potential for recycling of beverage container caps, and the new milk containers recently introduced by a local dairy.

DISCUSSION

1. Beverage Container Caps:

Councillor Warshick raised a valid concern about the large number of container caps that are generated by the type of packaging in use today. While we have mechanisms in place to recycle a portion of the containers that are currently manufactured, nothing seems to exist to deal with the container caps. This is another example of where businesses and manufacturers do not take responsibility for the solid waste they generate, and consumers have no option to return or recycle the packaging.

HRM has been working with the Regional Chairs Group in Nova Scotia, and with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, to seek more recognition for the fact that municipalities are left with the problems of solid waste management that result from business practices that do not support waste reduction and recycling.

The local recycling of beverage containers commenced in 1992 with the introduction of the Blue Bag Recycling Program. Since the introduction of the program, residents have been advised to rinse the containers, remove the caps and place the beverage containers in a blue bag. Our research has indicated there is little potential to create a cap recovery program for HRM at this time.

A recent survey by the NS Department of Environment and Labour has determined that no municipal recycling program in Canada recycles caps from beverage containers or other household products. The removal of caps from beverage containers is required for the safety of the staff at the Materials Recovery Facility, for operational processing, and for financial reasons as outlined below.

- a) On a typical day, upwards of 15 tonnes of beverage containers are sorted along the conveyor line at the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF). Since the caps would be buried under bottles, cans, plastic bags, and paper milk cartons, to physically remove them from the conveyor line would require a significant increase in sorting staff at the MRF.
- b) Beverage container caps, as well as caps from other household containers, consist of different types of plastics and metals. Caps would have to be hand sorted by material type. If caps were left on containers, they would have to be removed by hand.
- c) Caps left on beverage containers are potential projectiles when compressed into a bale (4' x 3' x 3'), which could result in injuries for employees at the MRF. Liquid left in a container would contaminate other materials and result in operational problems (e.g., conveyor belts not working, odours, etc.).

- d) We estimate that the recycling of caps would cost in excess of \$1,000 a tonne, require additional sorters, processing equipment, and transportation costs. This cost is well in excess of any typical per tonne prices for recovered plastics, assuming markets could be found for the caps.

Staff have contacted the Environment and Plastic Industry Council (EPIC), who represent plastic manufacturers and retailers in Canada, and they concur with HRM's practice of not recycling beverage container caps. HRM will continue with the research and lobbying activity to address container and packaging issues through provincial and national organizations.

2. New Milk Containers:

In February 2000, the Nova Scotia Milk Packing Stewardship Agreement was approved. Parties to this voluntary agreement include the Atlantic Dairy Council-Nova Scotia Milk Processors Division, the NS Department of Environment and Labour, and the Nova Scotia Solid Waste Management Regions (represented by the Chairman of the Regional Chairs Committee).

This agreement, which continues to 2004, provides funding assistance for municipal recycling programs that include milk product containers (e.g., milk, cream, whipping cream, etc.). The agreement references existing and future packaging and provides for messages supporting municipal recycling programs on the side panel of milk containers.

The gross costs associated with a municipal program that recycles milk containers (including advertising, collection, processing and transportation) are tabulated annually and submitted to the parties of the agreement for review. The agreement, which is a form of extended producer responsibility with the dairy industry, has worked very well for all parties. In 2001/02, HRM received \$143,000 from the dairy industry representing the costs of recycling 491 tonnes of milk cartons.

The introduction of a new milk container by a local dairy caught everyone by surprise. HRM staff received verbal notification the same day the product was on store shelves. Although no advance notification was provided, the local dairy received approval for the new container approximately four years ago from the Nova Scotia Dairy Council.

The following information is a response to specific issues raised by Councillor Warshick.

a) **Are the new milk containers being recycled?**

Yes, all of the new milk containers, including the screw cap gable top, the screw cap tetra package (with the flat plastic surface), and the plastic HDPE jugs are being recycled. Although very few plastic jugs have been received at the MRF to date, the HDPE plastic jug has a higher value, in the range of four times that of the paper

in a milk carton. Milk containers are not accepted at the twenty-three RRFB Enviro Depots in the HRM, as they are not included in the Provincial Beverage Container Deposit/Refund Program.

b) *Where are milk containers being recycled?*

Prior to 2002, fibre milk containers were recycled in the mid southeastern area of the USA. Milk cartons are currently being shipped to Asia for recycling. Markets for the HDPE plastic milk jug in North America have been historically very good.

c) *Was SWRAC consulted?*

SWRAC and HRM staff were not consulted or provided advance notification of the introduction of the new milk containers.

d) *How much of the 5-cent increase will come back to the HRM for recycling? Is any of this increase a profit?*

The increase in the retail price of milk, from HRM's perspective, has no impact upon the revenues received from the dairies. All gross expenditures incurred by the HRM, including processing the various new types of milk containers, will be submitted for reimbursement.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of the plastic HDPE milk jugs has the potential to increase revenue from the sale of recyclables.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no alternatives. So far, the Stewardship Agreement between NSDEL, the N.S. Solid Waste Management Regions and the Nova Scotia Milk Producers Association appears to be performing as envisioned.

ATTACHMENTS

N/A

Additional copies of this report, and information on its status, can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Jim Bauld, Diversion Planning Coordinator, 490-7176