

Town's lobbying for bottle return plan pays off

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Staff Writer

More than a year ago the Town of Halton Hills lobbied the provincial government to implement a bottle return system on drink containers, and this week, the Premier has finally listened.

Premier Dalton McGuinty announced a plan on Sunday to charge deposits on alcohol containers bought at the LCBO that would be redeemed at Beer Stores beginning February 1, 2007. The goal is to reduce the amount of bottles in Blue Box recycling program and/or garbage dumps, and subsequently, the cost to municipalities to deal with.

Wards 1&2 Regional Councillor Clark Somerville, a member of the Town's Litter-Free Task Force called this a victory for municipalities, in an interview Monday.

"And it's a big victory for the environment," he added.

In January 2005, Halton Hills council endorsed Somerville's resolution to petition the Ontario government to implement a system of deposit returns for all metal, glass and plastic beverage containers. The Town also requested the use of reusable plastic drink containers be mandated and a system of

deposit returns for Tetra Paks be considered.

To date, 82 Ontario municipalities have endorsed Halton Hills's resolution, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) also picked up the cause.

Wishing that the Ontario government had gone further, Somerville said, "Hopefully it's just a start. This is stage one of the victory."

Somerville explained while the LCBO pays \$50 million a year to Ontario government as a 10 cent environment levy on bottles, only \$5 million of that goes the Ontario Recycling Council to assist municipalities' Blue Box program. That results in local taxpayers footing the bill to dispose of these items, either through recycling methods or directly to the landfill.

He said soda pop and water bottlers and Tetra Pak makers should be taking more financial responsibility for the disposal of its products. "We should also be doing more about over-packaging."

"Anything that can be done to extend the life of the landfill is a good thing," he said. "Even if it extended by a year, it could save Halton taxpayers millions of dollars."

The new program is expected to divert 80 million LCBO bottles—many of those collected from the Blue Box program—from Ontario landfills.

The recycling of glass, especially coloured or broken glass, is costly for municipalities, according to AMO. After collecting, municipalities must then incur extra costs to send the materials, often to low-end markets such as for use in the manufacturing of asphalt, concrete or fiberglass insulation. The cash generated for the municipality isn't enough to even cover the original cost of recycling.

Under the provincial plan Beer Store staff will sort the returned LCBO bottles making them more saleable even if they are broken.

Ontario and Manitoba are the only Canadian provinces not to have a return-deposit system on its liquor and wine bottles. "We are so far behind other jurisdictions," Somerville pointed out.

According to the province's Environmental Commissioner Gord Miller, one-third of bottles bought at LCBO stores end up in garbage dumps, along with half the plastic and aluminum containers and 75 per cent of Tetra Paks.

The LCBO store has 600 stores and sells 600 million bottles of liquor a year generating more than \$900 million profit for the Ontario government. The Beer Store has 441 outlets and gets a 98 per cent return on its bottles.

—With files from *Torstar News Service*

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