

'To the moon' — and back

Recycling prices crash to earth

By Tim Foran

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The mantra is the three R's — reduce, reuse, recycle — but a fourth R, recession, has resulted in a dried up market for Halton's Blue Box materials.

Now, the company that processes and markets Halton's paper, aluminium, and plastic containers is asking the Region for a mid-contract bailout to cope with the economic downturn.

According to a memorandum reviewed by regional council last Wednesday, Halton Recycling Ltd. (HRL) is asking for financial assistance to offset the loss of revenue experienced since the recyclables market went south last summer.

"In August the average revenue earned from the sale of recyclable materials was \$190 a tonne. In January, the average was \$50 per tonne and there is no indication that market prices for recyclable material will return to the price levels that we have experienced in the past," states the memorandum from Mitch Zamojc, the Region's Commissioner of Public Works.

Debate on HRL's request was held in camera and the resulting direction to staff was not released. However, a follow-up report on the issue is tentatively scheduled to come before council's public works committee March 25.

The reduced market for recyclable materials doesn't only affect HRL. As part of a six-year contract that took effect in April, 2008, the Region receives from HRL 25 per cent of the revenue earned from the sale of its recyclables.

"Our proceeds are less, no question," said Milton Regional Councillor Barry Lee, who sits on the public works committee.

Halton also pays HRL an estimated annual price of \$940,000, according to a 2007 regional report outlining the contract.

Lee declined to comment on the specifics of the in-camera meeting, but said HRL is not the only recycling company hurting from the market's downward trend.

Revenues from recycling materials were "to the moon" in the summer of 2008 before crashing down to current levels, said Lee.

According to trade group Corporations Supporting Recycling (CSR), which publishes a monthly price index for recyclables in the Ontario market, the current monthly average for a tonne of recyclables is \$54, compared to an average of \$150 in 2008. The lowest annual average since 2000 was when the composite index hit \$95 in 2001.

Municipal councils across Ontario are advised to continue marketing their recyclable materials at the reduced costs instead of

stockpiling them in hopes market prices might rise again, according to a joint letter from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Stewardship Ontario and Waste Diversion Ontario released in late January.

Under Ontario's Waste Diversion Act, the companies that introduce the packaging and paper into the marketplace cover half of the net cost for municipal blue box programs. That means municipalities can recoup some money in 2010 and 2011, according to the letter.

Lee admitted it would be difficult to find another provider to process and market its blue box materials under the current contract conditions.

Calls to HRL's office in Burlington were not returned at press time.

The company, which is in the midst of changing its name to Emterra, provides waste management services to 25 Canadian municipalities, covering 10 per cent of the country's population, according to information on its website.

The company has three "single stream" material recovery facilities for recyclables in Canada, including its operation in Burlington. The single stream facilities allow for residents to put all recyclables into one container, with no necessary separation of paper from plastics and cans.

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