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Students just want recyclables picked up

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

When all the blue boxes disappeared from the hallways in their school, students at St. Mark Catholic School were outraged.

The Grade 5/6 class began a letter-writing campaign to complain about recyclables no longer being picked up at their school.

Collection of recyclables stopped in September around the same time that a new contractor, Turtle Island Recycling Co. Inc., took over collections in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The school was recognized as an Earth School in 2000 for its environmental initiatives, including recycling.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS UNAFFECTED

Relying on the town isn't an issue for the public schools in Whitchurch-Stouffville. They have their recycling picked up regularly under a school board program. All the recyclable materials collected goes to a regional transfer station, said Ross Virgo, York Region District School Board spokesperson.

The St. Mark students vented their feelings in their letters, after recycling wasn't picked up. Grade 5 student Jack Rowell noted that the school won the Earth School award and "now the bottles, paper and everything else are going into the garbage. It just isn't right."

For Alexandria Benedict, also in Grade 5, it didn't add up that students

have always been taught to recycle and "here we are doing that, but you are not." She went on to say that "our garbage dumps are already big enough and if we can't recycle they will get bigger."

Hayley Barnes noted her science unit is about taking care of the earth.

"I don't know how I'm going to take it seriously if my school can't recycle their own things," she wrote.

In their letters sent to local politicians and the media, many of the students described themselves as "disappointed" and "concerned."

Principal Chester Makischuk and the York Catholic District School Board say recycling was done for several years by Miller Waste Systems, the town's former contractor.

According to the town's director of public works, Paul Whitehouse, the school's caretaker was also taking recyclable to the volunteer recycling depot in Memorial Park.

"We were not aware that Miller Waste was collecting from them," Mr. Whitehouse said. "I don't know how long they had been doing that for the school."

But students and teachers soon took notice last month when the recycling trucks stopped coming to the school.

"Even though our plastic was sorted and put at curbside by our dedicated staff, the trucks now drive right past the bins," teacher Susan Whitebread wrote in her cover letter accompanying her students' letters. "What option does this

leave the school, but to throw the recycle into the garbage? This is against all the training our students receive at home and at school. The class is outraged."

As a stop-gap solution, teachers started taking recycling home, Mrs. Whitebread told The Sun-Tribune.

"Children of the taxpayers are spending most of the day here," Mrs. Whitebread said, "and that is where they generate most of the recyclables."

Turtle Island did collect recyclables from St. Mark School for the first couple of weeks in September, to help out the school, Mr. Whitehouse said, but stopped collection the third week.

TOWN MUST BE CONSISTENT

The town has to be consistent with all the schools, Mr. Whitehouse said.

The focus now is on the town carrying out its new green bin organic waste pick-up program, Mr. Whitehouse said.

The students also wanted to have something done about the paper and cardboard that hadn't been picked up. In this case, it seems there was a misunderstanding, said school board spokesperson Joann MacDonald.

While the number of bins was reduced from four to two, as outlined in Mrs. Whitebread's letter, the two are the larger bins. This pick-up is under the school board's jurisdiction.

Paper piled up in September because no one from the school called the board, Ms. MacDonald said. While waiting for the pick-up, the school has the option of storing paper and cardboard in clear plastic bags, she added.

St. Mark School called the board last week, Ms. MacDonald said, and the truck was slated to pick up the paper recycling the following day.

"We love that our students are environmentally-conscious," she said.

Some municipalities offer schools extensive recycling services, she said.

The board's environmental working group approaches municipalities not currently offering recycling services to schools to see what can be arranged.

All schools in the York Catholic District School Board recycle printer ink cartridges, computers and printers and furniture, such as broken chairs.

Fear not, items are recycled

Some residents have contacted the town asking why it appears the town's recycling and garbage contractor, Turtle Island Recycling Co. Inc., is tossing both garbage and the green bin organic waste into the same trucks.

That's because they're split trucks, Paul Whitehouse, the town's public works director, said. The green bins go into the front bin of the truck, while recyclable items from the blue box program are tossed farther back into the second bin.

From a distance, it appears like both are being placed in the same place in the truck, Mr. Whitehouse said.

In addition, newer trucks which Turtle Island is acquiring appear identical. But, one will pick up garbage, another recycling and a third organic waste.

"It is confusing to the residents," Mr. Whitehouse said.

To stack or not to stack?

Have you driven by Stouffville's neighbourhoods and wondered why the blue boxes, green bins and garbage containers are all stacked in little piles?

That's the Turtle Island Recycling Co. Inc.'s signature, said Paul Whitehouse, the town's director of public works services.

Workers empty the blue boxes first, stack them and then empty the green bins. They want to leave the area looking tidy, he said.

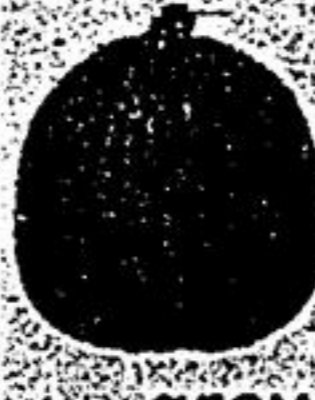


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