This page was exported from - King Weekly Sentinel
Export date: Fri Oct 30 12:23:04 2026 / +0000 GMT

Recycling fraught with challenges

By Skid Crease

As my wise old dad used to say, ?Son, always leave your campsite cleaner than you found it.? That adage really hit home when I began to look at my own community as ?my campsite.?

The Laudato Si' encyclical from Pope Francis, and the Climate Summit of the Americas in Toronto recently reminded us, Earth is home ? Earth is our campsite. While we are waiting for municipal, provincial and federal governments to take intelligent action in keeping our ?campsite? clean, we should examine our own personal responsibilities.

Over the summer this column will review what resources already exist in our community's environmental support network, and how we can fill in the gaps until the less well informed catch-up. Let's start with our household waste.

First, if it not reusable, recyclable or compostable, it is garbage. And only if it can't be reused, recycled or composted should it be put in the garbage. Is this difficult to understand in York Region?

Apparently so. In spite of the fact that York has clearly communicated the correct location for our household excess through its ?bindicator? guidelines, we have trouble translating this into action.

For example, much of our compostable material and our recyclable material is contaminated by us when we put the wrong materials into the wrong bins. Compostable materials make up from 30% to 50% of our household waste. If we did it properly, that would be a huge diversion from landfill. However, that would require full participation from every household and business, and full compliance with the guidelines.

Toronto estimates that they have only a 50% participation rate, and at least 20% of its Green Bin compost is diverted to the garbage stream because of contamination by non-compostable materials. In some jurisdictions, the contamination rate is as high as 70%, which means the contaminated compost ends up in our, or Detroit's, landfill sites.

There is also a problem of standards between regions over what is acceptable in the recycling and composting programs and what is not acceptable.

For example, while Peel Region will not accept diapers or animal waste in its Green Bin program, York Region will ? and that is a problem. Toronto has the same guidelines as York and has been dealing with the fallout over contaminated compost that is unhealthy to be put back on residential gardens. Diapers and tampons are not known for their biodegradability excellence, and why York Region accepts them in the green bins, along with pet waste and kitty litter is a mystery.

Until such time as we do achieve an ecological standard for healthy compost contents, we are bound to follow our own municipal guidelines. And if we do that properly, we can at least guarantee full compliance for diverting that stream of household yard and kitchen waste into productive compost for our yards and gardens.

The same concerns are equally true for recyclable materials. That part of the waste stream can also be easily contaminated by putting the wrong materials into our blue bins, by the vagaries of demand for the recycled materials, or by the availability of appropriate recycling facilities.

Household Hazardous Waste is another concern for King residents. Hazardous household wastes are those products that are poisonous, corrosive, explosive and flammable. The closest depots in York Region are both out of our Township, with one at 2840 Rutherford Road in Vaughan and 23068 Warden Avenue in Georgina. Those depots are for all of our household cleaners and detergents, paints and solvents, motor oil and windshield washer fluid, wet and dry cell batteries, and fluorescent tubes and mercury containing fluorescent energy efficient light bulbs (all other old light bulbs and LEDs go in the regular garbage). In Caledon our depot even takes spoiled gasoline from chain saws and mowers and old gas cans.

The latest data from the Toronto Environmental Alliance comes from a 2012 ? 2014 waste audit done for the City of Toronto and shows that 71% of what goes into our garbage bags could have been diverted to organics, recycling, reusing, and hazardous depots. For apartment dwellers that figure climbs to 86%.

The problem isn't lack of facilities. The problem is a failure to utilize the existing programs to the fullest. This is the direct responsibility of the homeowners and citizens of our Regions to be properly informed as to their rights and obligations to their community. And then to act accordingly.

Across from my house is a beautiful park. There is a basketball net and a playing pad in the park and a garbage can beside the net. The local boys cycle over and the neigbourhood dudes drive over regularly to have an afternoon game throughout the summer. At the end of a couple of hours of play, the area around the garbage can is littered with individual plastic drink bottles ? I have picked up dozens (38 at one count) at the end of each afternoon.

Now, you would think that big boys who drive fast cars and can hit a hoop from 10 metres away, could find the top of the garbage can for their waste. They know what to do ? they just don't. This is the difference between ignorance and stupidity. Our communities should neither tolerate nor demonstrate any more stupidity.
Time to clean up the campsite.
Skid Crease is an accredited member of the Association of Canadian Journalists. He is an award-winning outdoor and environmental educator, a keynote speaker, a storyteller, an author, and a community volunteer. He taught with the North York and Toronto District School boards for 35 years, and officially ?retired? from the Faculty of Education, York University, where he was a Course Director and Environmental Science Advisor. Skid has worked with scientists from Environment Canada (pre-2005), NASA, and the Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research in a quest to put an understandable story behind the wealth of their scientific data.