

ACHIEVING LANDFILL DIVERSION SUCCESS

BY JONATHAN MEADS



Metro Vancouver and the Capital Regional District on Vancouver Island are banning compostable material from landfill garbage as of January 1, 2015. This latest development ties into the broader initiative of reducing material sent to landfill. It's an important and admirable step which impacts all property managers within both regions of British Columbia. Compliance is not without its challenges, but significant change is possible.

Concert Properties adopted the challenge of significantly reducing landfill waste generated within its residential rental properties over four years ago. Concert's residential rental portfolio includes 21 properties in Vancouver, Victoria and Toronto. While significant efforts have been made across the board, within the portfolio of 12 residential rental properties in B.C. specifically, garbage-related greenhouse gas emissions have fallen 80 per cent compared to the baseline established in 2010. For others looking to comply with these newest regulatory changes, the insights gained along the way present an interesting learning opportunity.

Measuring total emissions generated back in 2010 began through Climate Smart, a social enterprise that helps businesses measure and reduce their overall carbon footprint. Throughout the process, Climate Smart provided valuable guidance on how best to collect and analyze emissions data, as well as allowing the opportunity to learn from other member companies. By critically analyzing emissions, there were opportunities identified for improvement, to establish a plan and

to quantify the results of efforts year-over-year.

With baseline results in hand, the opportunity to reduce the amount of garbage sent to the landfill from the residential rental properties was clearly identified. Working collaboratively with our existing recycling contractor, Urban Impact, a broad range of recycling streams was identified and offered — far beyond those typically made available. Residents were provided with the opportunity to divert styrofoam, small appliances, electronic waste, light bulbs, batteries, soft plastics, mixed paper/cardboard and mixed containers from landfill. Providing the infrastructure required for this scale of diversion saw immediate results.

With the addition of so many diversion streams came the increased likelihood for confusion. So over the past 18 months, simplicity was added to the diversion process with a focus on resident education as the key to significant success. A simple and clear visual system was created to represent each of the diversion streams. This system incorporates bright colours and easily-identified graphic icons that clearly identify each of the streams without the need for significant amounts of reading or deciphering. The traditional garbage room was replaced with signature Sorting Lounges, integrating these bright colours into both the paint scheme of the room and the actual bins to provide instant visual distinction. To provide further clarification, a recycling guide was created which is posted in each Sorting Lounge and produced in seven languages. Recently, organics have been added into the mix. The system of

colour coordinated diversion streams was expanded to include this stream. Each resident is provided with a small countertop organic waste bin and instructions regarding acceptable materials.

In the few years since implementing this program, the results have been significant. When compared to the 2010 baseline measurement, the combined efforts to focus on providing both infrastructure and education have resulted in an impressive 80 per cent reduction in the volume of material being sent to landfill by the B.C. residential rental properties. More surprising still is that this drop was achieved prior to implementing organics diversion. With the addition of an organics stream to the mix, the hope is that a 90 per cent diversion can be reached over the baseline in the coming years.

Is it possible to do even better? There are inspiring stories of great accomplishments from both near and far. In Sweden, for example, it's accepted that true waste diversion requires control of the sorting itself. In that country, there are only three streams — garbage, composting and recycling. Recycling bins are sorted off-site after collection and issues of cross-contamination are nearly eliminated. Some interesting food for thought. ❖

Jonathan Meads is sustainability & development manager for Concert, a role that entails promoting sustainability in the company's new construction projects, improving the energy and emission performance of income properties; and managing and reporting on Concert's emissions and sustainability practices at a corporate level.