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## KVARNSTROM: Government recycling policy a threat to newspapers

[Peter Kvarnstrom](#) / North Shore News

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British Columbians have every right to be proud of our world-leading recycling program, built right here in this province.

The achievement of the mighty Blue Box is the product of an efficient partnership between municipal governments, the private sector, and the people of British Columbia. It gets the job done and, at an average cost of \$35 per household each year, it gets the job done at a good price.

So, if the system for recycling waste packaging is working so well, why is the province so keen to "fix it" and hand it over to the very multinational corporations who shipped us all that packaging in the first place?

Sounds remarkable, but that is exactly what the provincial government is doing. On May 19, the government's new multi-material recycling regulation will formally end the days of local decision-making over our Blue Box programs and hand it to some of the largest producers of plastic and paper packaging the world has ever known. Critical decisions about the province's recycling program will no longer be made by elected representatives who live in the communities those programs serve. Instead, a group made up almost entirely of Toronto-based executives of multinational companies will decide who will pay how much for the privilege of collecting and processing your recyclables. What is going on here?

The consequence will be a dramatic increase in costs for British Columbia's businesses, particularly the province's newspapers. In fact, we estimate that the newspaper industry is threatened with a bill that could come to \$14 million. That is a dramatic increase when you consider that newspapers aren't required to pay product stewardship fees today, directly. Newspapers, like all businesses, pay for these services the same way all British Columbians do: through their property taxes.

That doesn't mean newspapers haven't been participating in recycling and the environment, far from it. In fact, newspapers are the original recycled product and publishers have taken steps, such as moving to vegetablebased inks, to minimize the environmental impact of our product. Diversion rates for newsprint are a remarkable 85 per cent, already well above the government's own target. The government's new recycling regulation wouldn't do a thing to improve newspapers' already impressive recycling record. What it will do, however, is dump a massive new cost onto the back of a fragile industry still challenged to stay standing. While our readership is stronger than ever, British Columbia's newspapers are struggling financially. Having Victoria force a \$14 million tax on newspapers in the current environment looks an awful lot like someone throwing an anchor to a drowning person.

Sadly, every single newspaper, from large regional dailies to the smallest community weekly, in every part of the province, will be impacted. Indeed, there is no greater threat to the vibrancy of British Columbia's newspaper industry today than the government's new recycling policy. Think about that for a minute while enjoying your next read. It is your daily newspaper, your community weekly, that is at risk here.

But the new recycling regime will not only cause a wave of damage and job losses across newsrooms everywhere, it will also have an impact on many other businesses, as well as thousands of municipal jobs that will be put at risk with the loss of local decision making for our recycling programs.

And don't believe for a minute that this will somehow help B.C. families. The reality is that these costs will be passed on to consumers, who will now pay for the cost of recycling every time they have a box of pizza delivered, pick up a carton of milk

or buy a roll of toilet paper.

The government still hasn't said what was so wrong with the current Blue Box program that they could only fix it by hurting local businesses and costing hard-working people their jobs. Yet, in spite of having no clear rationale, the province seems intent on gambling away the success of the Blue Box with an experiment in something they like to call "extended producer responsibility."

The ironic truth, of course, is that the government's new handsoff approach actually represents an abdication of responsibility, not its extension. As a result, decisions about nearly every aspect of our recycling system will be handed over to a small group of big businesses based thousands of kilometres east of the Rockies. British Columbia's environment minister may think that's just fine, but I suspect the people of British Columbia might have a different opinion.

Peter Kvarnstrom is chairman of the Canadian Newspaper Association and a B.C. newspaper publisher.

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