

Ontario blue box costs and contents to become packagers' concern

Municipalities would save \$115 million annually, says Ontario environment minister

By Kate Porter, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 19, 2016 5:30 AM ET Last Updated: Feb 19, 2016 10:11 AM ET

Ontario cities could save \$115 million a year by relinquishing the costs and contents of blue boxes to the manufacturers that created the recyclables in the first place, according to environment minister Glen Murray.

That's a big piece in the proposed Waste-Free Ontario Act being debated this week at Queen's Park.

The current system isn't working, Murray said, because most materials still end up in landfills.

"Proctor and Gamble, Unilever, who make all those wonderful consumer products, soaps and shampoos, will be responsible for the products and the cost of the life cycle of the products," explained Murray about how the new system would work.

Municipalities send bill to manufacturers

Companies would have to report data to a central, organizing agency.

Municipalities would still run the blue box program, according to the environment minister.

But instead of splitting recycling costs for blue boxes — and, in Ottawa, black boxes — down the middle with industry stewardship groups, cities would send the entire bill to the companies that produced the products, Murray said.

"I've been pushing for that because they think they can get savings; they think that they can improve their packaging, reduce the volume of their packaging, use materials that are more durable," said Murray.

"They'll design their products to be durable rather than designing their products for the dump."

Cities want 'seat at the table'

"It's a big change," said Dave Gordon, a policy advisor for the Association of Municipalities of Ontario who is following the waste file.

Ontario cities and towns support the overall notion of making producers take over the costs of dealing with what goes into recycling bins, he said.

But the new law should give municipalities a seat at the table to decide the roll-out, Gordon

said, because they're the ones who have to deal with the rest of the garbage the bill doesn't cover.

And, despite the minister's assurance, Gordon isn't convinced cities will always be the ones collecting residents' paper and plastic at the curb.

"I think municipalities want to ensure the service to residents remains intact with good service levels and good coverage," said Gordon.

Devil in details, city staff tells committee

The devil will be in the details, City of Ottawa staff told councillors at environment committee this week.

As it waits for Ontario regulations that would put meat on the bones of the new law, should it pass, the City of Ottawa will likely put off implementing parts of its waste plan that deal with recycling.

Staff noted that Ottawa contracts out a lot of waste management, so the city won't be left with costly city-owned recycling facilities should manufacturers decide to go about collecting their products and packaging a different way.

In Ottawa, paper and plastics in the black and blue bins make up just under 20 per cent of the waste collected from homes. Less than half is diverted to those bins, or the green bin, and typically 55 per cent ends up in the landfill.

Along with the blue box material, the new act would cover what happens with used tires, waste electronics, and hazardous waste.

The industry organizations that collect the controversial so-called "eco-fees" are also supposed to be eliminated under the proposed law.

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