

# Opposition to new recycling program grows, but B.C. presses ahead

BY ROB SHAW, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 12, 2014



The MMBC program will enable residents to recycle new categories of packaging that are not commonly included in existing curbside or depot recycling programs, including milk cartons, plastic foam packaging, plant pots, aluminum foil packaging, certain types of plastic film packaging and drink cups.

**Photograph by:** wayne leidenfrost, Vancouver Sun

VICTORIA — The provincial government will not be making changes to a contentious new recycling program before it goes live next week, even as a growing number of businesses line up to defy the rules and refuse payment.

Environment Minister Mary Polak said Monday she has met with critics of the province's new Multi-Material BC (MMBC) recycling scheme, but is not amending the regulations before they take effect on May 19.

"We have no immediate plans," she said when asked of possible changes before the program starts. "But I anticipate given that this is a program that will last many, many years ... you will see all sorts of things evolve and change as well."

The new MMBC program will shift recycling costs for packaging and paper from municipalities onto businesses that produce the material.

The province has argued that the program will increase the recycling rate for curbside blue-box collection and will save money for local governments that sign up. It has billed the program as an extension of its push in recent years to have industry assume responsibility for recycling items such as electronics, tires and batteries.

But some businesses, such as nurseries, grocery stores and newspapers, have warned the extra costs will threaten the viability of their operations. They have also balked at the lack of accountability for MMBC, which is expected to take in \$110 million annually in fees with little government oversight on how it is spent.

Nine businesses, including an Abbotsford horticulture company, a Prince George cleaning supply store, the head office of the COBS Bread franchise, and one B.C. Liberal riding association, have written letters to the premier objecting to the program in the last few weeks.

"The government is just ignoring everything that's being said now and just moving ahead," said Kelvin McCulloch, CEO of Buckerfields Ltd., a home and garden store with eight locations in B.C. that is leading the charge against the recycling program.

"I'm going to find out from the companies this week if they have an appetite to take MMBC's contracts to court."

Several of the companies pledged not to pay MMBC's recycling fees.

COBS Bread said it was "coerced" into signing its MMBC contract and **won't pay into a government-appointed recycling monopoly that charges fees that aren't based on the actual cost of recycling.**

"We will not be subjected to the unconscionable arrangements your government has created," the company wrote in an April 29 letter that threatened legal action.

There is also "all kinds of quiet non-compliance going on" by other companies, said McCulloch.

The B.C. Liberal Party's Cowichan Valley Riding Association passed a motion to write Premier Christy Clark and ask her to delay the program while it consults on how to mitigate the negative impacts to businesses.

Polak said she plans to wait and see what the companies actually do before discussing any consequences for not paying recycling fees.

While the government oversees overall compliance with recycling rules, the companies have individual contracts with MMBC to handle recycling and the government is not involved in those contractual disputes, she said.

Polak also brushed aside concerns that MMBC, which runs as a not-for-profit organization using a mixture of taxpayer and business fees, will operate outside the oversight of financial watchdogs like B.C.'s Auditor General.

MMBC is governed by the Ontario-based Canadian Stewardship Services Alliance's board of directors, which includes representation from Unilever Canada, Metro, Walmart, Tim Hortons, Loblaw Companies, Coca-Cola Canada and Procter & Gamble.

NDP small business critic Lana Popham said the government should delay the program while it explores changes to make it more accountable. She said it amounts to a "stealth tax" on businesses and will leave a society run by a small group of people in charge of \$100 million annually without basic financial accountability.

Government Crown corporations and agencies will also have to pay into the recycling program, within their existing budgets.

The Insurance Corp. of B.C., which mails printed reminders on driver licensing to homes throughout the province, said it will cost an estimated \$100,000 annually to comply with the new recycling rules, but that the costs are part of more than \$3 billion in yearly claims and won't impact insurance rates.

[rshaw@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:rshaw@vancouver.sun.com)

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun