

Out with the glass, in with the milk cartons at Metro recycling rules change

Recycling changes come into effect Monday across the province

BY KELLY SINOSKI, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 16, 2014



MMBC has given municipalities a year to get glass out of the blue box system, at which time it will penalize those that have more than three per cent contamination in glass.

Photograph by: MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, The Gazette

Depending on where you live in Metro Vancouver, your used pickle jars and glass bottles may be snubbed at the curb.

Under new recycling rules, which come into effect Monday, glass is no longer welcome to be co-mingled in Metro Vancouver blue bins with other recyclables.

And, in some cities like Surrey, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody, glass may not be picked up at the curb at all, but will be required to go to a depot.

That's because Multi-Material B.C., a non-profit environmental stewardship program, worries glass could break or contaminate other recyclable products in the blue bin and devalue their worth.

"We're still encouraging residents to take their glass to the depot because that will ensure it's being recycled and it won't break at the curb," said Allen Langdon, MMBC's managing director.

Langdon maintains less than 10 per cent of all glass provincially is recycled — with deposit bottles used for wine also often tossed in blue bins — because glass tends to break and is then thrown in the dump.

Under this program, municipalities can still collect glass at the curb as long as it is segregated. MMBC has given municipalities a year to get glass out of the blue box system, at which time it will penalize those that have more than three per cent contamination in glass.

This has led to a mixed bag in Metro. Vancouver and Delta will continue existing programs of collecting glass in recycling carts and blue bins, while Richmond, Langley City and Coquitlam will provide separate bins for glass collection — a move also considered by Burnaby and New Westminster. New Westminster Mayor Wayne Wright warns if the city doesn't collect glass at the curb, residents will just toss it in the trash.

"They won't save it and it's going to cause more problems," he said.

Rob Costanzo, Surrey's deputy manager of operations in engineering, said it doesn't make sense for his city to spend more on separate glass collection because Surrey's blue bins have a glass contamination rate of less than one per cent.

The city won't be worried, he said, until glass reaches the three per cent threshold. MMBC says municipalities with blue

bins that have a three per cent contamination, such as broken glass, will face a penalty of no more than \$120,000.

Richmond Mayor Malcolm Brodie said he doubts many residents will haul their bottles to a depot. "It's important we continue to recycle glass," he said. "I think people will get used to the idea very quickly."

Brock McDonald, spokesman for the B.C. Recycling Council, noted many facilities now collect a full range of items in one place, including refundable bottles, which will make it easier for residents.

Langdon noted that while glass is being shunned from the blue boxes, other items, such as aerosol cans, milk containers, coffee cups, plant pots and clamshell boxes, are being added. The full list is here: <http://recyclinginbc.ca>, include.

Most Metro Vancouver municipalities have signed on with MMBC, which means they will continue to run their municipal blue box systems, hand over the products to MMBC for marketing and processing and receive incentive payments — at a rate between \$32 and \$36 per household per year, adding up to \$30 million-plus a in Metro Vancouver — from the industry group. Delta and Langley Township have not signed on to the program, while Coquitlam will see its curbside recyclables collected by MMBC.

The industry stewardship program, comprising more than 1,200 major retailers and producers, is aimed at having industry take responsibility for curbside collection of recycled paper and packaging in B.C., and pay the costs of marketing and processing the products.

However, the program has been fraught with controversy, with municipalities initially balking at the project, fearing it might cost them more in the long term. A Richmond city staff report suggests Richmond's costs, after the MMBC financial incentive, are expected to be about \$740,000 per year — representing a savings of about \$1.27 million annually. However, the city is now concerned that MMBC wants to have Richmond's recyclables hauled to Surrey, which could cost the city up to \$750,000 per year.

"We're working with MMBC and insisting on the ability to bring it in closer," Brodie said. "Why can't we set up a recycling transfer centre in east Richmond? It would serve us well."

Langdon said it's his understanding that the blue box contents will be consolidated in the specific cities, including Vancouver and Burnaby, and then hauled out to one of two processing plants in Surrey.

Meanwhile, a group of business associations is also encouraging Environment Minister Mary Polak to boost oversight and accountability over MMBC, which as a non-profit organization will bring in an estimated \$110 million in annual fees with little financial oversight or public disclosure.

Seven groups wrote Polak on Thursday to call for annual independent reviews of the economic impact and effectiveness of MMBC, as well as a provision that would put a government minister in charge of approving MMBC's annual plans, fee schedules and fines.

"It was the government's change in policy and government's change in regulations that allowed this new system to exist, and I think the buck has to stop somewhere and it has to be the provincial government," said Laura Jones, executive vice-president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

The groups that signed the letter to Polak included CFIB, the B.C. Bottle and Recycling Depot Association, B.C. Agriculture Council, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, B.C. Printing and Imaging Association, B.C. Landscape and Nursery Association and Waste Management Association of B.C.

"They all have got member businesses who are very worried about the consequences of this policy," said Jones. "In some cases they are worried their members won't survive."

With a file from Rob Shaw

ksinoski@vancouversun.com

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