

PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP

by Clarissa Morawski

"In Durham Region, roughly 50,000 pounds of batteries were collected."



BIP

Battery recycling gets a blue box bump

As extended producer responsibility (EPR) programs continue to evolve across the country, economic instruments increasingly appear to incentivize recycling success. The most obvious financial motivator is the deposit in deposit-refund programs for items like shopping carts, car batteries, and empty beverage containers.

Another example of an economic instrument, which can stimulate collection and diversion, is a fee for service offered to commercial collectors, processors and recyclers. It's a seemingly simple tool used by stewards to financially stimulate recovery initiatives within the sector itself, rather than attempting to design and operate the collection system themselves. All they have to do is define the program boundaries and standards, and of course, set the right price.

Ontario's Battery Incentive Program (BIP) offers a good case study of an economic incentive working to bring the right people together and, in an effective way, collect large quantities of used batteries.

Money, convenience & partnership

So far, Ontario is the only jurisdiction that offers an aggressive economic incentive to both collectors and processors (recyclers) of primary batteries through the BIP, which commenced in early 2011.

The BIP is administered by Stewardship Ontario, the organization that represents the battery brand owners targeted by product stewardship recycling obligations. The BIP pays transporters \$1.54 or \$3.86 per kg (southern vs northern Ontario), plus an additional \$1.24 per kg processed. Some might suggest that the price is high, but this assertion is questionable because there's no baseline cost to compare with: higher than what?

No other programs in North America have even come close to the level of collection and recycling of primary batteries of this program; no one has ever monetized the value of recycling large amounts of primary batteries on a per capita basis, either.

No matter how controversial the issues are surrounding blue box programs, it's difficult to argue against the convenience of curbside recycling. Blue box recycling in Ontario was mandated nearly 20 years ago, and today offers over 95 per cent of the population regular curbside recycling pick-up. The opportunity to build on an existing door-to-door collection service to maximize the participation rate is a natural fit to collect residentially generated batteries.

So with the offer of an economic incentive, it comes as no surprise that Ontario's primary battery recycler, Raw Materials Company, based in Port Colbourne, teamed up with the Region of Durham and Niagara Region, Ontario to see if they could collect more batteries from households through their existing convenient curbside program.

Residents in Durham received a small plastic bag in their mail with instructions written directly on it. They were asked to place all loose primary batteries in the bag and set it on top of their blue box for collection during the week of daylight savings, to coincide with the fire de-

partment's existing fire alarm battery switch-out program (which takes place twice a year).

In Durham Region, approximately 250,000 households were offered collection last November for two weeks, and roughly 50,000 pounds of batteries were collected (0.20 lbs per household).

Niagara offered the collection opportunity with zip lock bags to about 25,000 households and achieved similar per household collections in combination with the blue/grey box on their pickup day.

Compliance

Stewardship Ontario ultimately funds the entire BIP and is the legal entity in charge of achieving the 25 per cent collection target set for 2013. The organization is supportive of the new collection method.

"We welcome inquiries from Ontario municipalities and service provid-



Zip lock bags facilitate ease of gathering and set out of used batteries.



Bags of batteries set atop regular blue box collection bins. Making the system easy improves diversion results.

ers interested in running curbside battery collection programs,” says David Pearce, Stewardship Ontario’s Director of Channel Management. (Pearce is also responsible for managing the collection network for Orange Drop.)

But, like any good collection program, diversity (versus a single program) is key. It needs to accommodate the many types of consumers and various points of discard. Pearce concurs.

“Curbside battery collection will only be a component of our battery collection strategy,” he says. “We continue to build our network of over 2,000 conveniently located battery drop-off locations to give residents that don’t have curbside battery collection programs options to safely and properly recycle their used batteries.”

Big gains in collection and recycling rates of primary batteries in

Ontario are possible if these types of collection efforts spread to other municipalities. Compared to 2011, RMC reports nearly doubling their Ontario volumes in 2012. With less than half of the population, Ontario collected more than double the volume of batteries compared to California, which is hailed as a huge success in the US. As the awareness of daylight savings bi-annual battery collection days continues to spread, the program can further be expanded to include rechargeable batteries. Collectively, the results provide significant environmental and economic benefits. ♻️

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