

An Integrated Approach to the Management of Waste and Recyclables

The Canadian Chamber recognizes the need for a consistent and equitable integrated approach to the management of waste and recyclables that incorporates social, environmental and economic considerations. We support the need to substantially reduce the quantity of waste that society generates, something that is driving a fundamental change in our attitudes and habits. Furthermore, we support the view that all segments of society, including the business community, should share responsibility for achieving this.

Traditional waste disposal practices are not sustainable. Such practices are wasting valuable resources, increasing social costs, and filling up difficult-to-site landfill space. The result has been initiatives from business and all levels of government to develop and implement new sustainable waste management technologies, processes and practices. Dealing separately with only a part of the waste stream or only one treatment method without considering the overall picture is likely to be environmentally and economically inefficient.

Industry recognizes its responsibility to minimize its use of resources and their environmental impact subject to the constraints of the function for which they are intended. Steps must be taken to ensure that products and packages are safe and compatible with waste management solutions. The federal government can demonstrate stewardship by helping to develop secondary markets through procurement policy that specifies the use of recycled materials.

In addressing this important issue, the focus should be on eliminating waste at its source, developing of sustainable alternatives, supporting waste/recyclables management infrastructure, educating the public and growing alternative markets for recycled materials. Industry has an important role in providing technical and policy input to the development of a waste management infrastructure, promoting technology transfer and contributing to public education.

Recommendations

That the federal government, recognizing the roles of the provinces, territories and municipalities, adopt the following guidelines in the planning, promotion and implementation of programs for the management of wastes and recyclables:

1. Eliminate duplication of efforts among all levels of government to ensure innovative approaches to waste management are not stifled by inappropriate regulation or policy constructs.
2. Develop an integrated approach to waste management that considers all sources of waste. The approach should combine source reduction, re-use, recycling, composting and recovery options (such as waste-to-energy), treatment and disposal methods into one overall system in a manner appropriate to the needs of each business or community based on sanitation requirements, sound environmental science and responsible economic principles.
3. Foster pollution prevention and waste minimization through appropriate funding.

4. Ensure that the costs of the various waste management methods are transparent, fully-costed and related to waste quantities rather than hidden or blended into other costs.
5. Continue to support Canadian business' efforts to develop, manufacture, market and distribute innovative and world-class waste minimization, management and recycling technologies.
6. Continue to favour industry non-regulatory commitments over prescriptive regulations (e.g., the National Packaging Protocol).
7. Ensure that government policy regarding waste management programs take into account a balance of environmental, economic and societal considerations by, for example, exempting recyclables from any definition of waste and recognizing that products can be created from by-products that might otherwise be considered waste.