

# Waste reduction the best solution

by Maureen Strickland

Canadians live in a throwaway society. As a result, household waste has emerged as an environmental problem and an issue in many regions of the country. It is one environmental problem that can be directly influenced, positively or negatively, by the day-to-day behaviour of individuals. In Halifax/Dartmouth, the problem of household waste has been given considerable attention over the past year because of the impending closure of the Metropolitan Authority landfill site in 1994. This site was established on 147 hectares of land in 1977. Based on present waste-generation projections, a new landfill site for the area will have to be approximately 350 hectares to last 13 years. The quantity of waste produced is seen as central to the issue of waste. This is typical of most discussions concerning household waste, and limits recognition of all the ramifications associated with it as well as limiting consideration of all possible solutions to the problem of waste.

Waste reduction is the best solution to the problem of household waste. It reduces energy use, the use of natural resources, and pollution, at both the production

Waste reduction also deals with the problem of the sheer quantity of waste and subsequent land use conflicts.

The general public has a major role to play in achieving the goal of reducing household waste. 94 per cent of Canadians believe we all must take personal responsibility if planetary survival is to be secured. The public should use their power as consumers to encourage waste reduction.

Packaging is one category of household waste which can be significantly decreased by consumer behaviour. Packaging makes up 30 per cent of waste by weight in North America and 50 per cent of the waste by volume. By weight, packaging is made up of 28 per cent paper, 27 per cent glass, 11 per cent plastics, six per cent steel, two per cent aluminum, and one per cent wood. The pollution generated by, and the inefficient use of energy and natural resources associated with, producing excess packaging cannot be justified.

Consumers must make conscious decisions to not purchase items with excess packaging, to purchase recycled or recyclable packaging, to avoid superfluous consumer products, and to purchase repairable and more durable products. Besides engaging in

more environmentally responsible consumer behaviour, there are other means to pursue waste reduction. Backyard composting of yard and food waste can reduce total household waste by 30 per cent. In Halifax it is possible to recycle paper, glass, tin, aluminum, and some plastic through various avenues. Reuse is another means of waste reduction if it translates into eliminating the need for some other product; otherwise, it just delays the entrance of waste into the waste stream.

Despite the belief that we all must take personal responsibility to stop environmental destruction, actions such as those outlined above are still the exception and not the rule. This inaction can be attributed to a number of factors: the inability of individuals to perceive any benefit accruing to them because of changing their behaviour, the behavioural change being regarded as an inconvenience, and the perception that on an individual level, action is insignificant.

These factors or attitudes can be dealt with in a number of ways. For some, the knowledge of the connection between products used and the waste they represent both at the production and disposal stages of their existence provides the impetus for environ-



Maria Patriquin — Dal photo

Degrading...?

mentally sound behaviour.

This impetus can also be achieved through economic methods, particularly a "user-pays" approach to goods and services related to waste. A user-pays approach would incorporate environmental costs into the price of an article, therefore encouraging purchase of the most environmentally sound items. For example, a graded tax could be imposed on all items based on the environmental costs of production and the environmental and economic costs of disposal. Such things as reusability,

durability, recyclability, and recycled content could be taken into account. Also, households could be charged per bag of garbage.

It is important that the energy and natural resource aspects of household waste should be recognized. A commitment to waste reduction now, either at an individual or community level, will alleviate immediate pressures on landfill sites and at the same time save energy and natural resources, and preserve clean air and water, for future generations.

## CEAG's mug campaign a big success

by Joey Goodings

Over three hundred students are now carrying their own Dal mugs to the cafeteria to combat the use of styrofoam on campus. The mugs are the first project of the Campus Environmental Action Group (CEAG) and, according to the group's treasurer, Maureen Strickland, they are a big success. CEAG has already ordered another 400 cups to meet the growing demand.

The mug campaign addresses the problem of waste styrofoam, which represents a waste of energy and natural resources, and produces waste through the production of the cups and through the cups themselves.

CEAG's promotional poster says "If you drink two cups of coffee a day on campus, you will use 260 styrofoam cups in two terms."

The styrofoam cups used at the campus cafeteria are made with fluorocarbons and are not biodegradable. "It's like burying rocks — they don't go away," says Roxanne Deavey, who organized the first meeting of CEAG last February. "They don't deplete the ozone to the extent that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) do, but they are still harmful to the environment."

As the need for new landfills grows, fewer communities are willing to provide new landfill space and there is growing pressure for better waste management. "What comes out of our environment must go back in. The situation with the environment is very serious and requires action, such as better waste management," says Deavey.

Dart Cup Ltd., which supplies Beaver Foods with styrofoam cups, sent Beaver a memorandum defending the use of styrofoam made with fluorocarbons, saying, "foam cups are as stable and as harmless as rocks, concrete and other inert landfill." The memorandum also says "Dart foam cups and containers . . . have never been manufactured with CFCs."

"The (CEAG) cups are good

for business," says Beaver Foods' Lisa Herson, who claims they have noticed a significant increase in the use of the cups over the past few weeks. Beaver Foods does not receive any money for the sale of the cups, and deducts five cents — the price of a styrofoam cup — from the cost of a medium coffee or tea every time anyone uses one. Beaver Foods will be sending an employee to a conference in Toronto to learn more about what they can do to be more environmentally sound and to learn about ideas in other universities concerning the environment.

CEAG is the result of a personal goal of Deavey, who has an interest in the environment and wanted to do something about the use of styrofoam in the cafeteria. In the first term of last year, she began bringing her own cup to the cafeteria instead of using styrofoam cups. In the second term, after having gathered information from the Ecology Action Centre, the Beaver Foods, and elsewhere, she organized a meeting for students who were interested in forming an environmental group at Dal. The response was very enthusiastic, groups on campus. Other pro-

jects on the go include recycling of aluminum cans and paper on campus. Meetings are held every Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. in room 306 of the SUB. Students wanting to get involved with CEAG are encouraged to leave their name and number at the SUB enquiry desk.

and the cups began selling in the

Dal cafeteria a few months later.

CEAG is an organization of students from all areas of study, both graduate and undergraduate, whose objectives are to improve environmental awareness and take action to increase existing activity throughout Dalhousie and promote communication between environmental



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