

IT'S 1991... DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR GARBAGE IS?

Sewage

BY LISA ROBERTS

WHERE DO THINGS GO WHEN YOU FLUSH them down the toilet? Do you know? Unfortunately, anyone who visits McNab's Island in Halifax Harbour will find out.

As a part of Fall Beach Sweep '91, September 23 to 29, sponsored by the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation and Moosehead, a group of 23 "sweepers" from Dalhousie, St. Mary's, Mount St. Vincent and Queen Elizabeth High School cleaned up a section of beach at McNab's on September 29.

In about an hour and a half they picked up condoms, syringes, and around a thousand plastic tampon applicators.

(No, these things do not disappear!) It was quite repulsive.

Other things on the beach appeared less disturbing, but are actually very destructive to sealife. Six-pack rings, fishing line and strapping bands were all found in abundance. "One can only wonder how much is still floating in the harbour or out in the ocean, and how many birds, fish, seals, whales and other sea life are entangled and wounded by this human debris.

The sweepers also found large amounts of plastic straws, lids and plastic bags, which, according to the Washington State Department of Ecology, birds, fish and mammals sometimes mistake for food, even feed to their young.

Jordan Hanson, a member of Dalhousie's Campus Environmental Action Group which organized this particular sweep, said, "we could go back every week," there was so much garbage on the beach.

The situation is similar on other Nova Scotia beaches, but it is improving due to the efforts of the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation's beach Sweep program. The Clean Nova Scotia Foundation is a membership organization, meaning that its funding comes from its individual, group, and corporate members. The Foundation is involved in a number of projects (Trash-Busters). Its largest volunteer activity during the past four years has been the Beach Sweep Program.

In June 1990, 180 groups, comprising 7000 volunteers cleaned Nova Scotia beaches at different locations. Thanks to the sponsorship of Moosehead, the Foundation was able to organize a fall Beach Sweep, and hopes to do so every year.

Martin Janowitz at the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation indicated that the fall sweep was somewhat smaller, with 2000 people cleaning 70 beaches. He said this was partially due to schools and other organizations just starting up for the year.

John Jenkins, operator the McNab's Island ferry, appreciates the efforts of the volunteers, but he is sure that it is not enough. Jenkins, who has been operating the ferry since August 1980, said while the beaches haven't been in good shape for a number of years, "this year was particularly bad."

Jenkins is also concerned that McNab's Island is a proposed site for Halifax's sewage treatment plant. The plant would be built at the historic north end of the island, actually positioned



All smiles, the sweepers diligently comb the beach for toilet junk.

on a small man-made island which will be created by bulldozing part of Ive's Point. Jenkins said if the plant is built, people looking out to McNab's from Halifax, Dartmouth and the bridges will see the buildings and smokestack of the sewage treatment facility. As for the beaches, he attributes the problems to the "hands-off policy" of the administrators of the island, Parks Canada and Lands and Forests, who each manage a part of the island.

"I think the island is an embarrassment to Parks Canada and to Lands and Forests," Jenkins said. Parks Canada did clean the beaches themselves on a regular basis during the summer up to Labour Day, but considering the number of garbage bags collected on the 29th in a short time, it is evident that not enough has been done.

Of course, Parks Canada employees are not the ones littering, throwing stuff off boats, or flushing things down the toilet. Another CEAG member, Jay Malchow, attributed the mess at McNab's to an "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" mentality, people simply do not consider the effects their actions have on the environment. "Nothing leaves this planet unless we shoot it up on a rocket." Malchow, who has just started graduate studies at Dalhousie, is from Michigan, said he found it "appalling" that Halifax does not have a sewage treatment plant. "Even small towns in Michigan have sewage treatment plants, and have had them for twenty years now," he said. However, on the subject of McNab's as a proposed site for Halifax's plant, he cautioned that Halifax may, "take care of one problem by building a sewage plant, then create another one by building it at the wrong place."

Malchow, like all volunteers at the beach sweep, was disturbed by the quantity of garbage that was picked up in a short time. He admits that the group probably didn't achieve much long-term ecological benefit, but "what we did accomplish was our own personal education." If the state of Nova Scotia beaches are to improve, a combination of sewage treatment and lifestyle changes, maybe guided by the Clean Nova Scotia Foundation's reports, will have to be initiated.

Incineration

BY STEPHANIE NOLEN

HALIFAX ENVIRONMENTALISTS ARE DIGGING in their heels for the last fight—but the regional government says they might as well not bother. We're getting an incinerator, wanted or not.

At the July 23 meeting, members of the Metropolitan Authority (MA) voted 7-4 in favour of incineration. Plans have been moving ahead to find a site and sign a contract with an incineration company.

But local environmental organizations such as the "It's Not Garbage Coalition," a grass-roots group formed in protest against the city's intent to burn, are still hoping they can stop the incinerator.

"The decision has been made to incinerate," says Anne Corbin, a member of the Coalition. "But our hopes are to reverse that decision."

All sides agree that this is a city with a garbage crisis. The Sackville landfill site will be filled in 1994. The city is currently hunting for a new site, but has also recognized the importance of alternatives such as recycling and composting.

Last winter, the MA announced their intention to include a solid waste incinerator in the city's new waste management system. This was done despite recommendations, made after eight months of studying various options, from the Solid Waste Management Advisory Committee, which stated in its report that incineration was not necessary.

They did recommend a combination of recycling, centralized and backyard composting, and hazardous waste collection.

However, the MA plan includes the incineration of 40% of the city's waste. The proposed incinerator needed to burn all that garbage will cost between \$80 and \$110 million.

Currently, the MA is considering possible incinerator sites proposed by city councillors. When a 10-acre site has been selected, the city will accept bids for contracts. And when the contract has been signed, the city will register for a federal, and possibly a provincial, environmental assessment.

There is a deadline hanging over all of this. The MA wants to sell the power generated from burning the city's garbage, some 13 megawatt hours, to the Nova Scotia Power Corporation. And the NSPC has a June 30, 1992 deadline for contracts.

The "It's Not Garbage Coalition" is disturbed by the haste with which incineration plans are moving ahead.

"They are trying to push the whole thing through so they can sign a contract with an incineration company," Corbin said.

She says the siting criteria used by the city in their consideration of locations are "very hastily put together." She says that the MA is "not going to go through the public" and that people are being left ignorant of the safety risks associated with the city's plans.

"For example, the proposals don't talk in very much detail about ash handling," she notes. "[They don't] point out that there are no management guidelines, that there are no federal guidelines [for

testing mercury and dioxin levels in ash] and that the provincial guidelines are very vague."

But Bill Fenton, chair of the Metropolitan Authority, says the region has put enough care into their planning.

"An awful lot of time was put into the siting criteria," he says. "These are the criteria that are applied throughout North America."

He denies the public have been left out of the planning process. "Public input opportunities have been legion," he says. Fenton says anyone with qualms will be able to "express them at the environmental assessment hearings."

These hearing will be held after the contract has been signed.

Most environmentalist fear incineration, a process which the American Public Health Association says increases "the emissions of heavy metals into the environment, their concentrations in the food chain and the danger to public health."

Incineration releases sulfuric dioxide, the largest cause of acid rain, carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas), and mercury and lead particulates. The process generates toxic fly ash, and also produces bottom ash, which has to be landfilled.

And as the "It's Not Garbage" people point out, incineration ends all hope of reusing the resources that end up ashes.

Fenton does not share their worries. He calls the incineration plans "the best I've seen up to this point." He says the city will recycle and compost the waste they can, and incinerate the rest.

Fenton does not have a lot of sympathy for the complaints of environmentalists.

"These people don't offer any viable alternatives," Fenton says. "They don't want to be bothered with facts."

The Coalition favours an integrated program of composting and recycling which they say could be implemented on a scale large enough to solve the region's waste problems.

They say 80 per cent of the city's waste stream is recyclable or compostable, and they say the remaining 20 per cent does not justify construction of the incinerator.

Corbin worries about the "misinformation" about incineration and about the city's plans.

"Councillors are looking at what consultants tell them, and they're not making up their own minds," she says.

The MA is following a plan discouraged by the Committee, but Fenton does not see a problem in the route the Authority is following. He says MA members must have "had the advantage of more expert opinion and reports than [the Committee] had."

The Solid Waste Management Advisory Committee was dissolved in August.

Following the October 19 municipal election, the membership of the MA will most likely change. Should the candidates elected be strongly opposed to incineration, the plan to burn garbage might be reconsidered.

But such a move would surprise Bill Fenton.

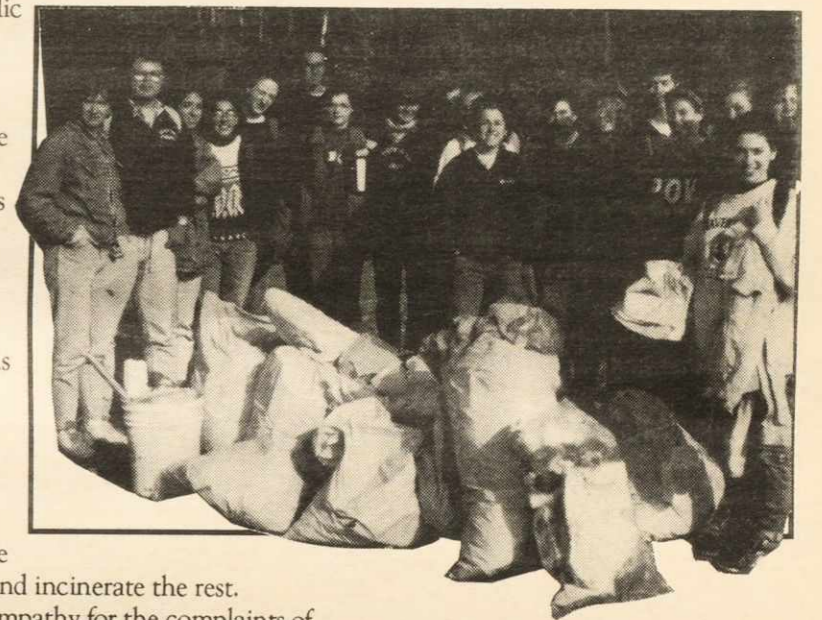
"The decision on July 23 was not written in stone. It is conceivable that it could be reconsidered," he says. "But I would be surprised."

Corbin and her group plan to keep fighting, and they are hoping they may have new allies on the MA.

"The decision could be changed. We'll know after the election, when the politicians show their true colours," Corbin says with a sigh.

The Coalition hopes that area residents will see the false solution the incinerator offers to the garbage problem, and that they will pressure municipal officials to reconsider the plans, before anyone signs on the dotted line.

23 miles, a cleaner beach and a pile of garbage bags marked the end of the day.



Four different schools converged for Fall Beach Sweep '91, from September 23 to 29.