

Students key in Campus Recycling

Apathy a major impediment to Dalhousie composting program

BY DAISY KIDSTON

Students are gathering at the Second Cup in Dalhousie's Killam Library, and by the contents inside the shop's garbage collectors, it appears they are not paying attention to a nearby composting bin.

Amidst the banana peels and apple cores, there is a high amount of styrofoam cups and other non-compostable garbage in the bin. Customers toss in yet another cup, paying no heed to the list of guidelines above the receptor. Perhaps there is a chink in the reduce, reuse and recycle cyclical pattern — the student body.

This compost bin is part of the Second Cup's "waste separation centre", which it introduced to their seating area at the end of November 1998. It is a part of Dalhousie's efforts to comply to the city's new composting guidelines, and is an active effort to reduce waste on our campus.

Mike Murphy, Dalhousie's manager of environmental services, headed the installation of a pilot composting program with Enviro Waste Ltd., an environmental collection agency. An "exchangeable cart system" has been set up in the SUB building and in the eating areas of residences such as Howe Hall, Sherriff Hall, and O'Brien Hall (DalTech).

The workers at campus restaurants and cafeterias place organic waste into the green compost bins which are collected by Enviro Waste Ltd., who transport the waste to The Good Earth Organic Resources Group in Sackville.

It is Good Earth who composts the material for \$50 per tonne. If this waste went to a landfill, the university would be charged \$100 per tonne.

According to Murphy, the program had a successful first month in December, in which 5.8 tonnes of compost was collected.

"The food service establishments have provided a very positive and enthusiastic response to composting," Murphy says.

However, Murphy concedes that a more difficult challenge in Dal's new composting program will be the collection of "non-contaminated organics" in the "seating areas of food service sales locations" such as the Second Cup. Since students and faculty of the university have to separate their own garbage, the only way it will be effective is if students pay attention to the new rules.

"If patrons observe posted signs indicating which items are acceptable within the compost waste stream and which are not, then the program will work,"

Murphy says.

You can tell that patrons aren't paying much attention if you look at the compost bins around campus.

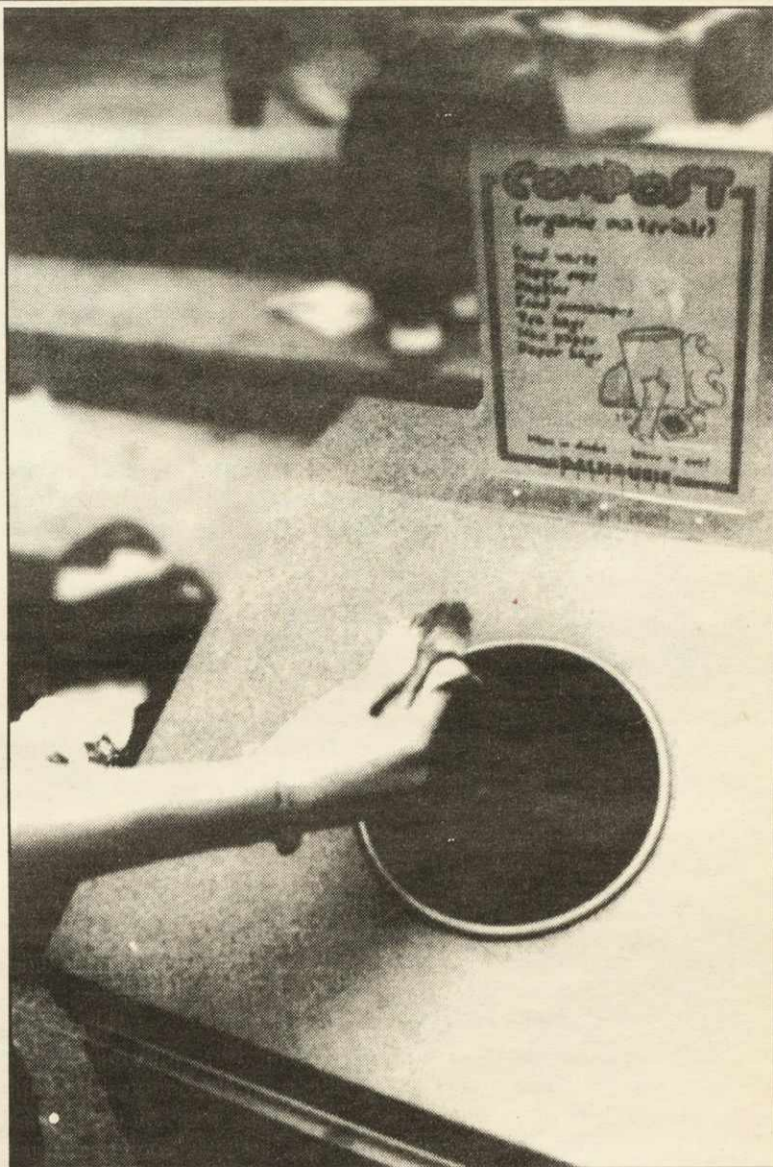
Granted, the signs above each of the four bins — one for compost, one for garbage, one for glass and plastic, and one for pop cans — could be a little clearer. There is no sign that actually says "Styrofoam here", something that would make it a little easier for the public — many of which do not want to stand around analyzing their garbage.

"It is a little annoying if you are just running by and don't know where to throw something in," says Shana Athaide, a patron of the Second Cup and a Dalhousie student.

Other patrons of the coffee shop were asked their thoughts on the waste separation unit. All five interviewed said they thought it was a good idea, and all five said they bring their own reusable mugs — usually (perhaps that could explain why only one out of the five actually had a mug with her).

However, in spite of the positive reaction to the composting bin, Bill MacKinnon, manager of the Second Cup, has a different story. MacKinnon feels students have been apathetic and are not making much of an effort to separate their garbage.

"Despite student complaints about styrofoam in the past,"

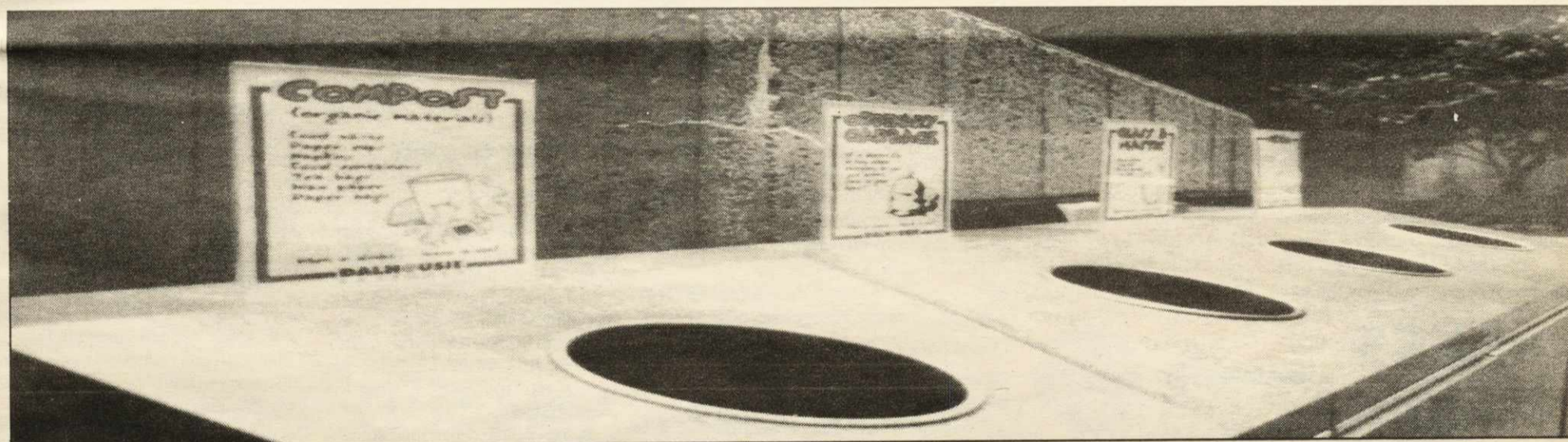


BLACK HOLES: Sucking in all sorts of student garbage.

MacKinnon says, "students are still buying styrofoam and are still ignoring posted guidelines and throwing their garbage into the compost bin."

When asked to estimate the

amount of students who actually bring reusable mugs to his shop, MacKinnon feels only about 20 out of 100 students bring their own mug, despite the incentive of 10 cents off the price of coffee.



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