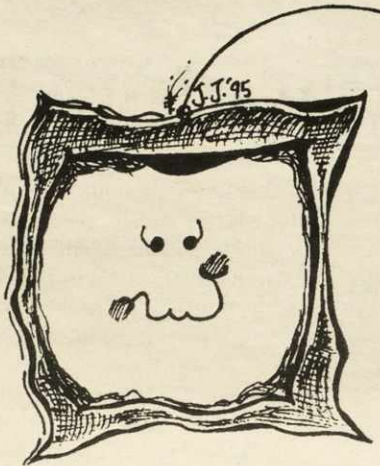


Real-life solutions to the some of the toughest environmental problems

COMPOSTING



BY DAVID WIMBERLY

Composting at last

This compostables ban specifies "all compostable materials" which includes foods, leaf & yard waste and even unrecycled papers. All of these produce clean, high quality compost suitable for general use.

Today's papers have been cleaned up through legislation; the metals, chorines and VOCs have been taken out of the inks and papers, thus protecting printers, readers, recyclers and compost. They are completely safe to compost.

Even though food, grass and other organic wastes can be composted without significant problem, when these materials go to the landfill they cause significant problems. When composted, the organics are turned and aerated so that the microorganisms that cause odours don't grow. But in a landfill, there is little oxygen and no turning, therefore the odorous microorganisms grow in profusion. Thus landfills always stink. Well-managed compost sites, however, are pleasant smelling.

When composted, foods are never exposed to areas where rats and birds reside. As well, these animals are not the usual pests at compost sites. However, landfills are notorious for attracting gulls

and rats.

When composted, food, grass, unrecyclable papers, and other organic materials are biologically transformed into humus, the crumbly material that "makes" topsoil when combined with sand and clay. Nutrients are recycled back into compost to enrich the finished product.

Quite the opposite happens in landfills, where harmful leachate is formed that dissolves toxins in other waste and flows out of the landfill. Unless caught and treated, leachate contaminates ground and surface water.

Comprehensive composting of all organics is the solution to keeping organics from causing landfill problems, and it saves money while producing a beneficial product.

Dalhousie University has long had plans to begin diverting all compostable materials just as soon as a facility opens. This will save money for the University that can better be used for education.

Unless council stumbles at the last moment and loses confidence, the composting project will open by July 1st. It is about time, so call and give your support to Council.

Grocery store goes green

BY CATHERINE WATTERS

The last thing you expect to see when you walk into a grocery store is a pamphlet telling you about over-packaging, environmental alternatives and consumer choice. But then, Kent Co-op in New Minas, Nova Scotia, is not your average supermarket.

"We have a responsibility to the community," says Burt Coleman, General Manager. That's why his store, along with other co-ops throughout Atlantic Canada, has phased in programs to make environmental practices part of the normal store routine.

"We have a duty to our members to do that, and to educate them and help them [be more environmentally aware]," said Coleman.

Kent Co-op educates its members through a program that includes placing environmental tips in the in-store fliers, making educational pamphlets available and using "Eco-Choice" shelf tags to indicate which products are less polluting or wasteful. These shelf tags identify safe alternatives to harsh cleaning products and point out products that can be reused, have refillable containers, use recycled materials or are less polluting than other products.

Some of the other pamphlets Kent Co-op offers explain composting and garbage reduction through reusing, reducing, and recycling. Putting these ideas into practice, the store has made arrangements with local farmers and mink ranchers to

take the store's food waste. Any meat byproducts that would normally be thrown away are ground up and fed to the minks, while the vegetables are either fed to farm animals or composted, depending on the quality of the food waste.

One of the more innovative steps this Co-op has taken in waste reduction is to reclaim the waste heat coming off compressors from their freezers, which they then use to heat the store. Not only have they succeeded in turning a waste into a resource, they are saving money on their heating bills and helping prevent air pollution.

To help members participate in waste reduction, Kent Co-op sells alternatives to plastic grocery bags. One alternative is a reusable, washable cotton bag. The other is a collapsible plastic container which fits easily into a car's trunk. When collapsed, it stands a mere 2-3 inches high. Cardboard boxes, available in-store, can also be used to carry groceries. These cardboard boxes can be reused or recycled by the co-op member.

Being environmentally responsible doesn't stop at the door. Many people are chemically sensitive and have to deal with indoor pollution resultant from scented products like perfume, hair spray and aftershave. These products often make sensitive people sick, from a mere headache to severe nausea.

The Kent Co-op encourages a scent-free workplace and offers scent-free, environmentally friendly product lines.



Keeping the Keeper a secret

BY TANIA TREPANIER

Can you imagine an alternative to mainstream sanitary products that doesn't damage the environment, doesn't pose a risk to women's health, saves money and is easy to use? It exists, and it's called the Keeper.

One woman throws away about 10,000 pads or tampons in her lifetime. Every year in North America about 12 billion pads and almost as many tampons are thrown away.

That's a lot of garbage. And, it's dangerous garbage. Bleached tampons and pads pose a major problem for sewage treatment facilities because of the chlorine-based toxins contained within them. When chlorine and paper products mix, organochlorines are formed. These dangerous toxins are a threat to the environment and to wildlife.

They are also a threat to women's bodies. Exposure to organochlorines are believed to weaken immune systems and lead to cancer. Also, every time a woman uses a tampon, tiny cuts form due to its drying action in the vagina. Furthermore, tampons absorb vaginal mucus which can lead to vaginal ulcers and toxic shock syndrome.

Yet the billion dollar sanitary products industry would have us believe that bleached tampons and pads are viable, convenient and safe. They have much at stake in keeping alternative products like menstrual sponges, cloth pads and the Keeper a secret.

The Keeper is an alternative menstrual product which has been around since the 1940s. However, as disposable sanitary products were promoted as more convenient and hygienic, products like the Keeper became hard to find. The Keeper is a 100% soft natural rubber bell-shaped cup which is inserted in the vagina where it collects menstrual blood. It was

originally known as the Tassette (little cup), but has been manufactured under its current name since 1988.

If the environmental, health and comfort factors are not enough to convince women to switch to the Keeper, perhaps the economic factors will. Eco Logique, an Ottawa-based distributor of the Keeper, claim that the Keeper pays for itself in about 5 or 6 months. One Keeper can last at least 10 years, and a woman can save from \$800 to \$1000 dollars over the lifetime of just one Keeper. These distributors have such faith in their product that they offer a three-month money-back guarantee.

In our society, women are often discouraged from talking about their health, particularly their menstrual health. We are all taught that menstrual blood is unclean and that women should use chlorine-bleached "whiter than white" products and pretend that we don't really bleed. It's time to take responsibility for our health and our environment. It's time for us to understand that bleeding once a month is not something to hide, but something to talk about with others, to find ways of making it less taboo. It's time for men to ask questions in an attempt to understand what menstruating is like and how it affects the women in their lives.

If you are a woman, buy yourself a Keeper. If you are a man, buy a Keeper for your sisters, your daughters, your lovers, your friends. These small actions are the stuff that revolutions are made of. And at the very least, your house plants could benefit greatly from a nutritious mixture of menstrual blood and water.

If you are interested in purchasing a Keeper or would like more information, please contact Danette Steele at 823-2202. There

is also an e-mail address (keeper@magi.com) and a toll-free number (1-800-680-9739) for further information.

Changing the pesticide landscape

BY LANCE MAKMILLEN FOR REAL ALTERNATIVES TO TOXINS IN THE ENVIRONMENT (RATE)

Councillors for the Halifax Regional Municipality are currently drafting a by-law which would effectively place a selective moratorium on the use of landscape pesticides (insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, etc.) in the densely populated metropolitan area.

If this bylaw is passed, our neighbours' pesticides will no longer drift into our homes, or onto our laundry, toys, pools and furniture. No longer will our children be getting synergistic effects from the mixture of chemicals that they now may encounter while walking to school on a bright spring day when rows of our lawns are volatilizing toxic pesticides and organic solvents from their surfaces.

You may ask, "Aren't pesticides safe? After all, they are registered by our government."

No, they are not safe. While the government can assure us that the pesticide that we buy will kill the target organism, they cannot guarantee that it will not destroy the health of your child, your pet or your neighbour.

According to Agriculture Canada, only three and a half per cent of the pesticides on the market today have been completely assessed, and these few tests were on adult men for short periods of time. Pesticides

Enviro adventure in Park Lane

BY KATIE ROOK

P'lovers. Sound familiar? Perhaps you have noticed their recycled shoes and clothing line. If you have bothered to venture into the Park Lane store, you may have noticed the toilet or the composting worms. What about their twig pencils, paper made from mushrooms or binders made from old computer parts?

No? Well, then Park Lane Mall's P'lovers is awaiting your discovery.

P'lovers was opened just over four years ago and has maintained its title as one of Halifax's only environmental stores. The store is committed to selling environmentally friendly products and promoting healthy environmental philosophy among consumers. Selling products while trying to promote such a philosophy may seem contradictory, but it is both the store's paradox and virtue: P'lovers's long term goal is to make the store unnecessary.

Liz Crocker, one of the store's co-owners, is the first to acknowledge the irony of having an environmental store in a mall. Stores must go where the business is, however, and Park Lane Mall is where it is at. Crocker, and co-owner Ann Caverzan, agree that by bringing the best available "green" products together in one

place they can help people make choices that are good for the earth.

Not all of the products sold in P'lovers are unusual. In fact, many of the items sold in P'lovers are products that one could find at any other store in the mall. Need a bag? There is a luggage store next store. Soap? Why not go to the Body Shop? Paper? Kinko's is down the street.

There are very few stores committed to selling products that won't harm the earth. Even fewer stores are committed to supporting the local economy. P'lovers, on the other hand, is dedicated to both of these objectives. By choosing the products sold in P'lovers over the products sold in other stores the consumer is purchasing an environmentally friendly product and investing in the local community.

Purchasing products at P'lovers can hurt the pocket book, though, as the products are more expensive than those found in other stores. For example, a 6oz container of toothpaste sells for \$7.95 — a seemingly outrageous price when you juxtapose it with the \$2.69 cost for the same container at Lawton's.

The difference between the two, however, is that the toothpaste sold in P'lovers is biodegradable, sold in recycled containers and is not

tested on animals. It is also much denser so a person can use less at each brushing. Furthermore, toothpaste and other hygiene products have a direct impact on the environment. They contain materials which cannot be broken down naturally. The result: contaminated sewer systems and waterways. If one chooses to invest in the "safe" toothpaste rather than the conventional brand they will be helping the environment directly.

Crocker laments the high prices of her products, but says she hopes that "in time the prices will come down." The more people buy the goods, the more likely it is that the prices will come down.

University students make up a large majority of P'lovers' clientele. This can be attributed to the fact that youth and university students are buying goods based on principles and not price.

Apart from embracing a different philosophy compared with other stores, P'lovers also distinguishes itself from other stores by the unique products it sells. Some items are hard to come by in other stores. The Deja shoe line is one of P'lovers's newest and most impressive products. These shoes are made from 100% recycled material. The most expensive pair sells for \$79.95 — not bad compared to the price of other shoes in Halifax. The least expensive pair is listed at \$39.95.

The store strives to provide leading edge products. When products become familiar in other stores, P'lovers moves on to another up and coming brand or item. It was one of the first stores to carry hemp clothing, pop-bottle fleece and items made from tires.

P'lovers has also contributed to environmental awareness in the community. The owners and staff give classes in various educational institutions, and have also appeared on ATV's Breakfast Television. The store also tends to act as a referral and reference centre for people interested in pursuing environmental issues. Crocker's position on the Board of the National Round Table of the Economy and the Environment has helped to make international organizations more accessible to customers.

P'lovers has also supported community projects whenever possible by dedicating their window or by giving financial support. The display case is also used to promote new products and covey messages and movements to the community.

Should you pass P'lovers on your next trip to Park Lane Mall, treat yourself to an adventure and enter in. Undoubtedly you will find a product of interest, be it the toilet, the composting worms or even a bag of popcorn. There is plenty to see, investigate and learn about.

