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Waste-diversion continues, despite eco-fee change

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Ontario's controversial new eco fees may have been dumped, but the goal of reducing the amount of household hazardous waste making it into the landfill is definitely worth reusing, says Stratford's waste-reduction co-ordinator.

Katie Alward said the new Orange Drop program is a good way to inform people about how to get rid of substances such as motor oil, paint, batteries, light bulbs and even pharmaceuticals. "It gives people more information, residents as well as small businesses, that accumulate this material and they want to get rid of it straight away," she said.

The diversion program, administered by an industry-based, not-for-profit organization known as Stewardship Ontario, actually began in 2008 under the provincial Tories with paints, solvents, used oil filters, antifreeze and batteries, but was expanded July 1 of this year to include other wastes such as aerosols, cleaners, fluorescent lights and pharmaceuticals.

It's an effective alternative to the city's own spring and fall household hazardous-waste dropoff days, said Alward, which aim to divert potentially harmful substances from the waste stream.

In fact, the two go hand in hand.

Under the Orange Drop program, a network of so-called "drop zones" have been established in Stratford and across the province, where hazardous materials can be taken throughout the year. The Orange Drop website (www.makethedrop.ca) has a list of 22 different types of materials -- from aerosol and antifreeze containers to pesticides and portable fire extinguishers -- and points to local facilities or retailers where those items can be dropped off.

Type in your postal code and choose "single-use batteries" from a drop-down menu, for example, and the website will direct you to Perth Communications or Canadian Tire.

Select pharmaceuticals for humans and pets and the site lists a number of local pharmacies where they can be taken.

"It's very beneficial, so that people can get rid of certain materials any time of the year," said Alward.

There's not a local dropoff site for every one of the 22 types of materials on the list, but those not covered can always be brought to the Romeo Street depot on the designated household hazardous waste days.

"We're still going to be accepting all of those things at the landfill" during the spring and fall collection times, she said.

And city residents hardly seem to need to be prodded into participating.

Last year alone, more than 47 tonnes of hazardous waste were collected at the Stratford landfill site, with 1,583 vehicles lining up to drop off materials. That's about on par with the numbers from 2008.

"That's absolutely amazing," said Alward. "I think we do extremely well."

The next designated household hazardous waste collection days in the city are scheduled for Sept. 27 to Oct. 2.

And while the municipality has nothing to do with the now- cancelled eco fees, which were intended to cover the cost of the Orange Drop program, Alward said she has heard from several people who were upset about the additional charge.

"We've had a lot of response (on the fees)," she said. "People are frustrated."

Enough people across Ontario -- consumers and retailers -- have spoken out about the eco fees and the confusion surrounding them, in fact, that the provincial government announced Tuesday it will be scrapping them for the new items added to Orange Drop July 1 as it works at revamping the program.

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