

October 6, 2009

THOUSANDS OF HOUSEHOLDS IN METRO VANCOUVER CAN START PUTTING FOOD SCRAPS AT THE CURB

Almost 3,000 households in Coquitlam, Delta, Langley Township and West Vancouver can now add food scraps to the yard waste they put out at the curb.

Metro Vancouver and the four municipalities launched a demonstration project this week to look for the best ways to encourage residents to take advantage of a new recycling opportunity.

Residents who live in designated single-family neighbourhoods of the four municipalities can participate in the demonstration project. The project will run until the end of March, 2010.

The lessons learned during the next six months will be applied across the Metro Vancouver region next fall, when many municipalities intend to introduce full-scale food and yard waste collection programs.

"We already recycle cans, plastic, newspapers and mixed paper, so why shouldn't we recycle food?" Metro Vancouver Board Chair Lois Jackson said.

"Recycling food and other organic waste into soil will help replenish the soil in our gardens, yards and farms," said Jackson, who is also the Mayor of Delta. "Best of all, a resource that most people now throw into the trash can be diverted away from landfills."

Metro Vancouver estimates that 190,000 tonnes of food is thrown in the garbage each year in the region. The estimate doesn't include food-soiled paper, such as used pizza boxes and paper coffee filters, or soiled paper towels, napkins or facial tissues.

The City of Port Coquitlam led the way. In June 2008, Port Coquitlam became the first municipality in the region to invite residents to add food scraps such as vegetable cuttings and fruit peels to the yard wastes put out at the curb for collection and recycling. Next month, on Nov. 2, the program will be expanded to include other food scraps like meat, bones and dairy products.

In June 2009, Metro Vancouver announced it had signed a long-term contract with Fraser Richmond Soil & Fibre, which operates one of the largest commercial composting operations in the region. The company will increase capacity at its facility in southeast Richmond, so the facility can handle an additional 50,000 tonnes of food waste.

Meat, fish, fruit, vegetables and dairy products are just some of the organic materials that will be composted and transformed at that site into soil and mulch products, which are then sold to landscapers and other large-scale buyers.

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Food composting will help the region maximize resource extraction from garbage and achieve its Zero Waste Challenge goal: a 70 per cent diversion rate by 2015.

Currently, because of recycling and product stewardship programs, about 55 per cent of the region's solid waste or garbage is now diverted away from landfills and the region's Waste-to-Energy Facility in Burnaby.

For more information, please call Metro Vancouver at 604-432-6200.