



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **WASTE, SUSTAINABILITY, IT'S ALL GOOD (MOSTLY)**

It has been a busy and enlightening time. Fiona Wood, YREA Communications and Community Outreach Coordinator, and I attended the York Region Environment First Symposium, which this year focused on business waste reduction. One of the presenters, Walmart outlined their ambitious goals to create zero waste, to purchase 100% renewable energy, and to sell products that sustain our resources. Particularly noteworthy was a scorecard on product packaging and their pressure on their suppliers to reduce. One wonders if this newer, greener Walmart is simply a ploy to detract from their abominable social practices. Hopefully, they will feel so go about their ecological emergence they will tackle their social policies next.

At the Durham Region Stakeholders Sustainability Forum, a question regarding the contradiction of spouting sustainability and endorsing an incinerator at the same time was quashed by the moderator. These are very valid concerns which MUST be addressed. YREA made a similar observation in commenting on the York Region Official Plan. On the one hand York Region purports to protect agricultural lands, on the other they have approved the building of an inefficient gas fired peaker plant right in the midst of the Holland Marsh.

Of particular interest was hearing Robert Cox of Coxlyn Farm Ltd. speak of their environmental plan which deals with manure management of their dairy herd. This project has cost the farm \$250,000 of which \$80,000 was funded by Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA). Such a worthy scheme should have been more fully supported by other grant programs. Production of biofuel along the German model was brought up and lo and behold, an article in the Toronto Star the same day outlines a green energy farm project in the heart of oil country that can turn any kind of organic waste into biogas. Farmers and conservation authorities need to partner and secure sufficient funding for these types of very worthwhile green endeavours. To read the Star article go to [www.thestar.com/business/article/722497](http://www.thestar.com/business/article/722497).

Gloria Marsh

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### PLANNING FOR ACTION (PFA)

*By Fiona Wood Communications & Community Outreach Coordinator*

The PFA meeting held on November 5th was a great success. I have posted a summary on our brand new blog at [www.yrea.org/blog](http://www.yrea.org/blog). Please feel free to comment. We are hoping to see the conversations continue and develop there.



## MARKHAM'S JOURNEY TO ZERO WASTE

by Claudia Marsales, Manager,  
Waste Management, Town of Markham



Markham's Zero Waste journey began with an eye-opening trip to the dumpsters at the Civic Centre loading dock which waited to be emptied and trucked to far-off landfills along with the rest of Markham's household waste.

That was 2007 when Markham's diversion rate was over 70%. The green bin program had been successfully implemented and its four recycling depots were booming. Staff and politicians knew it was now time to reach higher and embrace the challenge of becoming a Zero Waste municipality.

But what is Zero Waste? Traditional municipal waste management systems have been developed on the premise that waste is an inevitable end of pipe burden that must be managed, collected, disposed of and paid for through the property tax system. The Zero Waste philosophy, on the other hand, moves waste management to the point of purchase and recognizes the impact on the system of poor packaging, short sighted purchasing policy, bad product design and recognition that garbage is never free.

But what was in those dumpsters? An audit provided the undeniable evidence - a whole lot of things that shouldn't have been - lunch remnants, coffee cups, polystyrene containers, diapers from the on-site daycare centre, computers, signs, wood pallets, and a multitude of paper, including huge amounts of paper towels from the washrooms. Over 90 per cent of the dumpsters' contents could have been recycled.

What happened next was the milestone decision that Markham's Civic Centre - the workplace for some 500 employees, and site for many local events and activities - would clean up its in-house act and become a Zero Waste facility. It would be impossible for Markham to espouse the goals of Zero Waste and higher diversion to local

households, businesses and organizations until it had its own house in order. Markham's aim was to lead by example.

Today, most of the 500 garbage cans that once populated every work station and office at the Civic Centre are gone, replaced by under the desk blue boxes and 23 recycling centres where staff deposit organics and mixed recyclables. Every staff member is now their own waste manager.

But removing the work station garbage cans was only the first step. Piece by piece, the Town is reviewing its purchasing policies, contracts and operating procedures with the Zero Waste lens firmly in place.

The Markham Civic Centre is also the site of a large cafeteria and numerous events, including weddings virtually every day. Effective July 2008, the Town's main caterer had to conform to the new Zero Waste policy, and all polystyrene products - including plastic utensils and clamshell containers - were banned. The staff cafeteria began using biodegradable knives and forks (which go in the green bin), unbleached napkins and fair trade coffee served in recycled (and recyclable) paper cups. By January 2009, the Zero Waste policy applied to all caterers providing food services directly to the Town and at Town supported events in the community.

### Five Easy Steps to a Zero Waste Facility:

1. Do a complete waste audit of your building's garbage
2. Remove all individual garbage containers
3. Set up recycling centres - properly color coded and labeled
4. Make garbage difficult and recycling easy - train the caretakers to understand the goals of Zero Waste
5. Change your purchasing practices by factoring in the cost of disposal



## BATTERY

## POWER

by Kristen Martyn, YREA volunteer

It has only been in the last 15-20 years that we have considered alternatives to single use batteries by making the switch to rechargeables. Batteries contain a combination of heavy metals, acids, and other chemicals. By reducing your use of single use batteries you will be reducing the amount of toxins in our environment. As a consumer there are three main ways you can reduce the amount of batteries going to landfill sites:

1. Reduce your consumption of batteries. Whenever possible purchase products that do not require batteries.
2. Purchase reusable (rechargeable) batteries.
3. Dispose of or recycle your used batteries responsibly.

Many people know that rechargeable batteries are better for the environment but they express disappointment at their effectiveness. The following contains useful information on how to get the most out of your rechargeables.

“By reducing your use of single use batteries you will be reducing the amount of toxins in our environment.”

**STORAGE LIFE:** Over time rechargeable batteries will lose their charge. This can be a nuisance for consumers because if you leave batteries in a device that is infrequently used (such as a flashlight) it may require recharging prior to use. Standard rechargeable batteries can lose their charge at a rate of 1% per day. Some of the best rechargeable batteries in the market may hold 85% of their charge for over 1 year.

**MEMORY:** The less memory the better! Rechargeable batteries with memory effect need to be completely drained before charging or you risk lowering the overall charge capacity of the battery. For example, if you use 90% of a battery's memory life and then put it in a charger, you will lose that extra 10% of battery use. The next time you go to charge your batteries your maximum charge will only be 90%. The battery life will continue to decrease unless it is drained prior to each charge. Rechargeable batteries with little or no memory do not have to be drained before recharging, regardless of usage resulting in minimal impact on battery life.

**PERFORMANCE AT LOW TEMPERATURES:** Extreme hot and cold temperatures can alter the performance of rechargeable batteries as they may not be able to hold their charge. Cold temperatures are a common prob-

lem in Canada since batteries may be left in a basement, car, shed or garage in the colder months. Look for rechargeable batteries that operate well at low temperatures, holding their charge and stability.

**NUMBER OF CHARGES:** The more charges you can get out of rechargeable batteries, the better for the environment and your wallet. Resist the temptation of getting the cheaper single use batteries averaging about \$7 for a pack of 4 AA. Rechargeable batteries can be used about 1000 times so the initial higher cost translates to about 3 cents for a 4 pack, plus the cost of electricity to charge.

**CHARGERS:** For optimum life, batteries should be fully drained after every ten charges. Look for a recharger with this feature. Charge intelligence is also worth the extra cost. Some of the more expensive chargers have a micro-processor which tells the charger to shut off once the battery charge is complete. These chargers can also detect how much charge the battery has and add only the required charge. Intelligent chargers are also more energy efficient as they only use energy that is needed and then shut off. Be sure that your charger will charge all of the battery sizes you use as some will only charge AA and AAA batteries. Avoid high speed chargers which rapidly charge and overheat batteries.

Google *best battery chargers* for up to date consumer information and feedback.

### WHERE TO TAKE USED BATTERIES FOR RECYCLING IN YORK REGION?

Single use and rechargeable batteries: York Region Household Hazardous Waste and/or Recycling Depots. Check York Region's website for local drop-off locations and times [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca). For rechargeable batteries, go to [www.call2recycle.org](http://www.call2recycle.org).



## WORKING TOGETHER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by Sylvia Bowman, Conservation Director York- Simcoe Naturalists (YSN)



From the time the York Simcoe Naturalists were founded in 1999, we have been a member of Ontario Nature's Nature Network of approximately 144 organizations. This immediately put us in contact with quite a diverse group of people, and has primed us to be open to sharing and partnerships.

In this part of Ontario, it is difficult not to become involved in many environmental issues due to the fact that we are targeted by the provincial government as a growth area. This in turn led to the waste water management project known as the "big pipe" and the incinerator proposal. Projected growth has also led to the expansion of freeways such as the 404 and the possibility of the Bradford bypass project. A predicted increased need for electricity has led to the transformer station and the peaker plant projects. Both of these projects are of great concern to our group because we are stewards of a lovely place that sits between them, and Ontario Nature's Cawthra Mullock Nature reserve.

Working on efforts to fight these projects has led us to become great friends with organizations such as Smart Growth Ontario, The Concerned Citizens of King Township, megawhat?, STORM, Windfall Ecology Centre, and the farmers of the Holland Marsh.

The work on the Lake Simcoe Act and the initiatives that have come from it have led us to work with groups such as Ontario Nature, our sister organization The South Lake Simcoe Naturalists, Environmental Defense, Ladies of the Lake, Save the Maskinonge and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA). The great thing about working on the Maskinonge Recovery project is that it is positive rather than negative. Although we do participate in other positive initiatives, it is nice to be a part of some concrete projects that will make a difference to the health of the watershed.

Most issues have resulted in very informal partnerships that involved meetings on an irregular basis over a period of several months. This was the case with the peaker plant project. The Maskinonge Watershed project has been a more formal partnership involving regular monthly meetings to work on goals and brainstorm project ideas.

All of these activities of the YSN over the past few years have led to an ever widening group of contacts that can only be helpful in efforts to act as watchdogs of the activities generated by the growth in our area. Many of the Groups in York Region are small and have limited resources and so it only makes sense to work together more closely when important issues arise. The work that the York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA) is doing to try and bring more groups together for coordinated action is to be applauded.

### GREEN GIFTING

With seasonal shopping in full swing, consider these wasteful facts:

- 99% of the stuff we buy is no longer in use six months after it was purchased.
- For every one garbage can of waste you put out on the curb, 70 garbage cans of waste were produced upstream to make the junk in that one can.

CONSIDER GIFTING SERVICES SUCH AS: lessons, therapeutic massage, chiropractic, auto tune up; consumables - such as Ontario wine, cheese and other delicacies; carbon credits; weekend getaways; tickets - to plays, concerts and sporting events; admissions - to art galleries, shows and museums; phone cards; restaurant and even grocery vouchers; or, why not consider a donation to a worthy organization such as YREA on behalf of recipient?



## TOXICITY OF FABRIC SOFTENERS/DRYER SHEETS

A new study finds that conventional fabric softeners contain deadly chemicals that slowly absorb into your skin. With an increase of asthma and eczema in children and our indoor air known to be 3 times more polluted than outside it makes sense to eliminate as many toxins from their environment as possible.

Here is a list of just some of the chemicals found in fabric softeners and dryer sheets:

- Benzyl acetate - linked to pancreatic cancer
- Benzyl Alcohol - upper respiratory tract irritant
- Ethanol - on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Hazardous Waste list and can cause central nervous system disorders
- A-Terpineol - can cause respiratory problems, including fatal edema, and central nervous system damage
- Ethyl Acetate - narcotic on the EPA's Hazardous Waste list
- Chloroform - neurotoxic, anesthetic and carcinogenic
- Linalool - narcotic that causes central nervous system disorders
- Pentane - a chemical known to be harmful if inhaled

Are fluffy clothes worth it if they are making you sick? Fabric softeners are made to stay in your clothing for long periods of time. As such, chemicals are slowly released either into the air for you to inhale or onto your skin for you to absorb. Dryer sheets are particularly noxious because they are heated in the dryer and the chemicals are released through dryer vents and outdoors to pollute the environment.

### LIGHT SWITCH

If you have fluorescent tube lighting in your basement, workshop, garage or other utility areas, consider converting from T12 to T8 tube lighting with electronic ballasts.

Benefits include:

- 35% energy saving
- Less hum, flicker and mercury
- Better light quality, better for the environment

Health effects from being exposed to the chemicals in fabric softeners include:

- Asthma
- Eczema
- Central nervous system disorders
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Blood pressure reduction
- Irritation to skin, mucus membranes and respiratory tract
- Pancreatic cancer



Even if you don't feel the effects of these chemicals today, they can affect you gradually over time, and children, whose systems are still developing, are particularly at risk. There's really no reason to expose

yourself to these risky chemicals when natural alternatives exist. Not only are they safer for you, your family and the environment, but they're much more economical too.

Soften your clothes safely with these alternatives:

- Add a quarter cup of baking or unscented washing soda to wash cycle to soften fabric.
- Add a quarter cup of white vinegar to rinse to soften fabric and eliminate cling.
- Check out your local health food store for a natural fabric softener that uses a natural base like soy instead of chemicals.

On a practical note - fabric softeners coat towels with a film which impedes their absorbency.

Sources:

- [www.familyfriendlyedmonton.ca/articles/fabric-softeners.html](http://www.familyfriendlyedmonton.ca/articles/fabric-softeners.html),
- [www.norwexgreenclean.net/page/page/5367159.htm](http://www.norwexgreenclean.net/page/page/5367159.htm)



# GREENWORKS



## SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING



Dear YREA supporter,

If you endorse initiatives which address:

•SUSTAINABILITY •CLIMATE CHANGE •GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS •WASTE REDUCTION •ENERGY CONSERVATION

Then we invite you to financially support the **York Region Environmental Alliance's** exciting new campaign geared to showing the public in York Region, the GTA and beyond, how easy it is to make planet friendly purchases.

**SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING** will engage young and old with informative workshops, eco-shopper quizzes, challenges and tools to make greening your shopping habits easy.

**The York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA)** formed to raise awareness of environmental issues; initiate and support sustainable solutions – especially personal lifestyle choices – through campaigns, interactive resources, events and strong partnership building. WE NEED DEDICATED CITIZENS SUCH AS YOU TO BE OUR PARTNERS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES!

To get involved, to volunteer, or for information about becoming a sponsor of **SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING**, contact Fiona Wood, Communications and Community Outreach Coordinator [fiona@yrea.org](mailto:fiona@yrea.org).

**Of course, it costs money to mount an effective campaign. Your financial assistance will make a vital difference in helping us meet our goals. To make a tax-receiptable donation, click Donate Now.**

If you prefer, mail your donation to YREA, 225 Lakeland Crescent, Richmond Hill, ON L4E 3A5

**Thank you so much for considering this request.** There's no better time to support the environment.  
Charitable Registration Number: #84559 0553 RR0001

Sincerely,

Gloria Marsh, Executive Director, York Region Environmental Alliance  
*Partnering for a greener planet*



### YREA extends its heartfelt thanks to our latest donors

PROTECTOR: Gloria Marsh  
CUSTODIAN: Town of Richmond Hill  
STEWARDS: Diane Keating, MDS Inc.  
FRIENDS: Sylvia Bowman, Sharon Bradley, James Carver,  
Liz Couture, Mary Delaney, Ally Ladak, Rosemary Park

### Thumbs up to these volunteers

Carol Cooper, Kristen Martyn, Stephen Cockle, Constance Tsang