

Press Release

Newly formed Zero Waste Canada joins international call for an end to waste

Toronto, ON, (January 18, 2013) — Canada is a wasteful country earning an average D grade in terms of municipal waste generation, says a recently released Conference Board of Canada report. The newly formed group Zero Waste Canada wants to change this and have Canada become a country where waste is eliminated and resources are continuously reused.

“We are pleased to join with international Zero Waste experts from around the world to promote the best-practice policies, legislation and initiatives that eliminate waste,” says Erich Schwartz, a British Columbia-based ZWC director.

Schwartz adds that zero waste is not some pie-in-the-sky unattainable target. Communities and corporations that have adopted zero waste goals are achieving significant results. For instance, San Francisco, U.S.A., Kamikatsu, Japan and Caparoni, Italy are diverting 80% of their waste while according to the Conference Board of Canada report municipalities in this country are diverting an average of only 23%. Considering that 40% of municipal waste is recyclable and another 40% is organic, Canadian municipal diversion rates should be much higher.

ZWC was formed when academics, recycling businesses and community advocates from across the country came together to advance waste solutions that provide local jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, protect the environment and human health and conserve resources. This is the first national organization in Canada that is fully dedicated to promoting a genuine zero waste model in accordance with the Zero Waste International Alliance.

“Wood, metals, chemicals, minerals, organics, aggregates and other resources are valuable and should never be burned or buried. It just doesn’t make sense. In a world of finite resources and diminishing renewable resources, we need to reduce what we take while continuously reusing and recycling the resources that we do use,” says Schwartz

Achieving zero waste is about much more than just recycling. Zero waste adheres to a hierarchy of highest and best use that aims to first prevent and reduce waste at the source by encouraging manufacturers to redesign products to be reusable, repairable and durable. “Once we establish that waste prevention is the ultimate sustainable goal, we can look seriously at what’s being discarded and develop strategies with the help of manufacturers, scientists and our communities to create a waste-free Canada,” says Schwartz.

Candice Anderson, a Toronto-based ZWC director, notes that according to the Conference Board of Canada report, Canada generates 34 million tonnes of waste per year or 777 kgs per person, well above the average of 17 industrialized countries with only Australia and the U.S. generating more waste per capita. Canada’s low diversion rate compounds the problem, Anderson says.

“All of those resources going to waste is a tragedy and what’s more, Canada’s municipal taxpayers are digging pretty deep into their pockets to dispose of all this unnecessary waste,” says Anderson. “We need to look at how zero waste leaders from around the world have managed to achieve diversion rates of 80% and higher and then

we need to start implementing those solutions here in Canada.”

One area where improvements can immediately be made, says Anderson, is by taking organics out of the waste stream.

“As 40 to 60% of all municipal waste is organic, a significant amount of compostable material is filling up our landfills where it breaks down into methane — a very potent greenhouse gas. We could significantly impact greenhouse gas emissions, decrease the need for landfill and return valuable nutrients to our depleted soils if we would just ensure all organics are composted,” says Anderson

Schwartz makes it clear that incinerating or gasifying waste is not a zero waste solution.

“Incineration destroys reusable and potentially recyclable resources forever,” says Schwartz.

Although incinerator proponents claim burning waste is a good way to generate energy the process consumes more energy than it generates and is polluting, exorbitantly costly and inefficient Schwartz notes. “Incineration produces greenhouse gases, dangerous emissions and toxic ash that must still be landfilled. Energy-from-waste is really a waste of energy and it has no place in the Zero Waste hierarchy.”

Zero Waste Canada is determined to restore Canada’s status as an environmentally progressive nation.

“According to the Conference Board of Canada, our country produced more waste per capita than any of the other 17 industrialized countries surveyed. Surely we can do better than that. ZWC wants to kickstart a complete rethink of how we manage our resources with the goal of eliminating waste,” says Anderson. “We want Canada to become part of the global zero waste community.”

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Zero Waste Canada (ZWC) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that promotes solid waste solutions that eliminate the use of landfills and waste-to-energy plants. ZWC advocates at all levels of government for responsible resource management and policies, legislation and initiatives that eliminate waste and support continuous reuse of resources. ZWC provides resource management demonstration projects and education, and is a reliable go-to resource that collaboratively promotes social, environmental and economic well-being.

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