

Solid Waste in New Brunswick

During the late 1970's and early 1980's, many solid waste dumping sites in New Brunswick were reaching capacity. Over 300 dumps were scattered across the province, operated by the New Brunswick Department of Transportation, municipal government, or private owners. The 11 dumps in the Fundy Region were located in Spruce Lake, French Village, Chance Harbour, Maces Bay, Grand Bay, Browns Flat, St. Martins, Kingston Peninsula, Quispamsis, Welsford, and Hampton.

The search for new disposal sites was a lengthy and tedious process. Residents of areas adjacent to proposed sites attended public meetings in great numbers to express concerns about the preservation of environmental and aesthetic values in their communities. As a result of the public outcry, the province became committed to finding a new direction for solid waste management in New Brunswick.

On January 14, 1986, Honourable Robert C. Jackson, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, announced that a major public consultation effort would commence. 'The importance of input from the public in the development of waste management programs cannot be overly stressed,' said Mr. Jackson. 'Experience has shown that New Brunswickers are becoming more environmentally conscious all the time, and are demanding that waste disposal practices meet a very high standard.'

A five-member task force for the Environment Council conducted seven public consultation programs throughout the province and received a number of opinion letters and written submissions. As a result, a report offered 18 recommendations to the Minister of the Environment concerning the future direction of waste management in New Brunswick.

Recommendations Set by the New Brunswick Residents

During the Environmental Council's Public Consultation Program, the residents of New Brunswick expressed a clear desire that the 18 principles be adhered to in every commission's waste management program and projects. From these principles, three broader principles were offered as overriding concerns, which were intended to guide the future development of all components within New Brunswick's comprehensive waste management program.

Three Statements of Principle

- Public safety and environmental protection must be the primary considerations, at all times, in the planning and operation of all waste management programs.
- Effective public consultation and involvement in planning and implementation of new waste management systems in the Province are absolute prerequisites for success. To secure confidence, the public must have an opportunity to play a meaningful role in decision-making and overseeing the future operation of the system to ensure that public health and environment concerns receive maximum consideration.
- All governmental agencies in the Province must comply, and be seen to comply, with the New Brunswick Government's Environmental Acts and Regulations. If a specific statute is found to be unenforceable, it should be either repealed, or amended to ensure that it can be successfully enforced.

The strong and clear recommendations that were stated in the report served as high but attainable standards for each of the commissions to comply with.

The residents of New Brunswick expressed the need to promote the establishment of environmentally acceptable and cost effective waste management systems, concentrating available resources in several large-scale regional projects rather than smaller sites. Under the Province's new approach, regional commissions were established and given direct responsibility for all aspects of solid waste management in their respective areas.

The division resulted in thirteen regions, each guided by a Solid Waste Commission. All Solid Waste Commissions include representatives from each municipality, unincorporated area, and Indian band within its region. Each of the Commissions is charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing a regional solid waste program.

As a result of the sweeping changes to solid waste management in New Brunswick, residents were given the responsibility for their actions in their region. The user pay approach gave each of the Commissions the financial means for both the planning and operation of a solid waste strategy.

The Province produced a guide titled *Regional Solid Waste, Public Information/Consultation, Stage 1- Developing a Strategy*. The document outlines the necessary steps for the Commissions to follow while devising their solid waste management plan.

The first requirement of each Commission was to conduct a technical and financial analysis of various waste management options for their region.

The second requirement was to establish a two-way communications channel for the people in the region on all matters relating to solid waste management planning.

Executing a Solid Waste Management Plan

The next step in the process was a site identification study followed by an Environmental Impact Assessment. The EIA process took place in all the regions except those with a Transfer Station. In those regions, the waste was collected and then sent to another Region's Landfill.

The principle objective of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) study was to predict impacts which may be expected should the project proceed. The study, conducted in consultation with the residents from the area of potential impact, was also expected to identify methods of enhancing positive impacts and minimizing negative impacts resulting from the project.

Upon completion of the final draft of the EIA report, public meetings were held near the area where the project was proposed. At the public meetings, interested parties were encouraged to make comments, raise concerns, and ask questions pertaining to the EIA study. A summary of the public comments was presented to the Minister of Environment, and decisions were made by the Provincial Cabinet to deny or approve each site.

The Fundy Region

In 1989, the Fundy Solid Waste Action Team (Fundy SWAT) was formed with a mandate to develop a strategy for managing solid waste generated in the Fundy Region. Fundy SWAT consisted of representatives from the City of Saint John, the Towns of Grand Bay-Westfield, Saint John, Hampton, Rothesay, and Quispamsis, Village of St. Martins, and the parishes of Hampton, Rothesay, Kingston, Greenwich, Westfield, Petersville, Clarendon, Musquash, Saint Martins, and Simonds.

With direction from the region's residents, Fundy SWAT undertook the challenge, by means of a democratic process, to resolve how to manage the Fundy Region's solid waste.

Following the guidelines set by the Province, an extensive public communications process began. The goal was to gather residents' opinions regarding proper requirements for waste handling. Fundy SWAT became a household name. The search for a local solution to a local problem became everyone's concern.

The Fundy Region was the last region in New Brunswick to complete the challenge of orchestrating the closing of the dumps and opening of the new landfill. Notification that the 11 small dumps were subject to closure came from the Minister of the Environment, Vaughan Blaney. Upon the Minister's announcement, plans to commence the opening of a landfill in the Fundy Region began. The Fundy Region was in search of a local solution to a local problem.

The aim of the public information and consultation program was to be proactive in addressing the solid waste management concerns of the residents. A newsletter called *SWAT Talk* was published in order to capture the concerns of the residents and groups over the two year period of gathering options.

Two-way dialogue with the public through written surveys, phone surveys, public workshops, and open public hearings was also an integral part of the decision making process. Everyone was welcome to speak at the meetings as either an individual or a representative of a group.

After two years of research and public consultation, many concerns were recognized and in a cumulative fashion, recorded, and evaluated. A collaborative effort by many produced a set of Guiding Principles for the Environmental Impact Assessment. At the end of the public information and consultation phase, the following statements were adopted as the guiding principles for solid waste management in the Fundy Region:

Hierarchy

We are committed to a hierarchy of waste management options. The order of priorities for waste management shall be reduction, reuse, recycle, and recovery. Wastes that presently cannot practically be dealt with in these ways should be disposed of in landfills, incinerators, or other technology, whichever is most appropriate for the particular waste stream in question.

Waste Reduction

Our most important waste management measures are those that reduce the volume of waste we generate.

Reuse

We should strive to make products and packaging reusable and to encourage their reuse.

Recycle and Compost

We should strive to recycle or compost all wastes.

Recovery

We should attempt to recover energy, gases, fibres, or other products from the waste generated, and from the waste contained in closed out disposal facilities.

Implementation

A firm commitment to the ongoing progress of waste management options should be reflected in policies, goals, planning, budgets, and staff involved in waste management.

Waste Monitoring

We must continually monitor the composition, volumes, and sources of our waste and the products of their disposition in order to evaluate existing programs.

Public Involvement

All residents, businesses, and institutions in our region are waste generators and should be involved in waste reduction efforts.

Facility Siting

There must be full public discussion of potential sites, and of short and long term effects of each waste management facility.

Siting the Fundy Region's Landfill

With the Guiding Principles adopted, the groundwork began to determine where the landfill would be sited. Through a careful process of site selection, the Department of Environment in conjunction with the Commission reduced 157 possible sites to six.

The results of the next stage in the evaluation revealed two sites tied for first, and a third scored much lower in the evaluation. The two top sites were at Crane Mountain and Paddy's Hill. An extensive Environmental Assessment was conducted on both the Crane Mountain and Paddy's Hill sites. When attempts to purchase the land at Crane Mountain were unsuccessful, the other site (Paddy's Hill), which is adjacent to the City's then active Spruce Lake dump, was put forward for Cabinet approval.

With Environmental Impact Assessment hearings completed in February 1995, the local community of Lorneville put forth emotional arguments against the Paddy's Hill site.

Consequently, there was little support from both the municipal and provincial governments for the Paddy's Hill site. It appeared that both top sites had been eliminated, and a local solution could not be generated. The waste would have to be exported to Westmorland-Albert near Moncton. This was recommended publicly, without any financial consideration. At the same time, closure of the 11 dump sites in the region was taking place, and unbudgeted disposal costs to the municipalities began to build. In addition, the Spruce Lake Dump was given a deadline for closure.

The Commission, now realizing the lack of municipal and provincial governmental support, prepared a factual and sobering financial report, detailing the true cost to export the region's solid waste. The true cost totalled in excess of \$200 million over the 25-year term. The largest Commission of the 13 Commissions in New Brunswick would face a loss of economic benefits of \$200 million if a landfill was not sited in the region.

The closure of the Spruce Lake Dump and the Commission's financial report exploring the true cost to export the region's waste provided the incentive for the Cabinet to approve the Crane Mountain site.

In 1997, the Commission put together an aggressive schedule to open a new containment landfill. Within one year, the landfill at Crane Mountain was open and receiving waste. This eliminated the extreme costs associated with shipping waste out of the region. Local infrastructure was planned to allow for waste diversion programs. The combination of the new state-of-the-art landfill and the waste diversion programs will provide an answer to the Fundy Region's waste disposal for many years to come.