

ENVIRONMENT INDUSTRY WEEK 2021

BRIEFING NOTE: Changing how we see “waste” to embrace the circular economy

What is the issue?

What we used to call “waste” is increasingly being seen as a valuable set of resources that can be diverted from landfills and put into productive reuse, extracting their value, creating new products and powering a new generation of companies. ONEIA member companies support policy measures that modernize our approach to these resources. We recognize that this includes reducing “red tape” and streamlining regulations that date from a time when waste was not seen as a resource. Instead, we need a policy environment that encourages companies to develop new and/or improved technologies and methods that recover value from our waste streams for all Ontarians.

There are two main areas where we can do better with respect to recovering value from waste and diverting it to more productive use:

- Proposed measures pertaining to organics diversion;
- Expansion of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs, specifically, paper and printed packaging, into Ontario’s industrial and commercial (IC) sector.

What is the potential impact?

Organics: ONEIA is deeply concerned that the Province’s current approach to waste recovery facilities (particularly proposed guidelines to control odour) will make it unnecessarily difficult for companies to attract investment, develop and deploy new technologies, and operate the critical infrastructure that will divert a wide range of residential and commercial waste streams from landfills.

The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) is proposing odour guidelines that run contrary to the Province’s goal of reducing GHG emissions. These measures, if left as is, may force resource recovery companies to move their facilities to increasingly remote areas, increasing truck traffic, highway congestion, reduce air quality, and increase GHG emissions. These proposed measures also add to the regulatory burden of these vital companies and make it more difficult for them to attract investment to build facilities that will focus on areas such as organics reprocessing, green hydrogen production, bioplastic and biogas generation, renewable natural gas production and a range of additional beneficial reuses.

As our population and economy grows, Ontario will require billions of dollars of investment to modernize and expand its current resource recovery infrastructure and to find new uses for what we used to call waste. Without a practical approach to regulation, attracting this investment and building these vital facilities will be in danger, putting Ontario at risk of not being able to achieve our waste diversion and circular economy objectives.

Expansion of EPR into the Industrial and Commercial (IC) Sector: ONEIA supports the diversion of materials from the municipal waste stream from landfill through the move to full producer responsibility for the residential Blue Box program. However, members are concerned about the extension of this program into the IC sector and the unintended consequences that could result from applying the logic from a program that was designed for individual homes to the complexities of the thousands of different types of industries and commercial installations across the province. Facilities as different as automotive parts suppliers, shopping malls, electronics manufacturers, textile and garment factories, and food processors have vastly different supply chains, material streams, and waste volumes. Moreover, they are supported by a complex and interconnected web of “just-in-time” logistics arrangements that are incredibly sensitive to disruption and delays. The province needs to tread very carefully in this area and not assume that it can apply a “one size fits all” approach to IC resource streams.

For more information

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Detailed responses to these and other waste and resource recovery issues can be found on ONEIA’s website.