

Beer Store leads the pack on recycling

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There's more to The Beer Store than a case of your favourite brew.

Ontario's beer-retail chain has its environmental act together better than most. Eco-activist Franz Hartmann wishes other companies would start following suit, especially the makers of the small appliances and electronics that municipalities find most difficult to recycle.

Toronto is expanding its programs to deal with everything from old vacuum cleaners to televisions. But could the city be doing more?

"No," says Hartmann, executive director of the Toronto Environmental Alliance. "That's the short answer."

His longer answer involves the principal of extended product or producer responsibility – usually known as EPR.

The Beer Store, Hartmann says, does it "wonderfully. The property taxpayer never gets involved. The non-consumer of beer never has to deal with the situation."

Co-owned by Labatt, Molson and Sleeman breweries, The Beer Store touts itself as "a global leader in the practice of extended producer responsibility and unique among Ontario retailers in that it takes back all of the packaging materials that it sells: bottles, cans, cartons, caps, kegs, plastic bags and can rings.

"All collected materials are either reused or recycled. With an impressive recovery rate of 95 per cent on the industry standard bottle (the most prolific container in the market), TBS is undoubtedly the most successful waste diversion program in Ontario if not all of North America."

Geoff Rathbone, general manager of Toronto's Solid Waste Management Services, says industry funding of 50 per cent of the city's green-bin and other recycling programs is part of a provincial EPR initiative.

Packaging, says Hartmann, is almost as big a headache as the product when it comes to disposal.

"The responsibility has to go beyond delivering a product to, say, Wal-Mart," Hartmann says, "We need the companies to take responsibility."

This is being done, says provincial environment ministry spokesperson John Steele.

He points to WEEE, Ontario's Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment program. It aims not only to give people many more opportunities and locations to participate in recycling programs, but also to shift the cost from taxpayers to the companies that introduce the products into the Ontario market.

Steele says about 91,000 tonnes of unwanted televisions, computers, monitors, fax machines and printers are generated in Ontario each year. Until the inception of WEEE, most went to landfills.

He agrees with Hartmann about excess packaging.

"I just bought a home theatre," he says. "So there's the question of what to do with my old TV and stuff. But it also came with an enormous amount of packing material. It's mostly cardboard and easily recyclable but it has to be dealt with."