

City restaurants wasting away: Recycling program turns leftovers into compost

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Illustration: Photo: Dan Toulgoet, Vancouver Courier / Organic waste from the Fairmont Waterfront Hotel kitchen ends up in an enclosed compost heap in Squamish.

Two associations representing restaurants and hotels in B.C. are urging their Lower Mainland members to join an organic waste recycling program.

When the B.C. Restaurant and Foodservices Association saw the Regional District of Nanaimo prohibit the disposal of organic waste from restaurants, hospitals and grocery stores this spring, it decided to take action in the Lower Mainland. The association joined with the B.C. and Yukon Hotels' Association and Smithrite Disposal Ltd. to create an industry-run program for recycling organic waste in anticipation of a similar prohibition being enacted in Greater Vancouver.

The Fairmont Waterfront hotel, Capilano Suspension Bridge restaurants, The Keg, Boston Pizza, Capers and Granville Island merchants have signed on to the program, which started in June.

"It makes good business sense for us," said Michael Pye, director of operations for the Waterfront. "And it's something that we can be proud of as well."

The program is saving the Waterfront approximately \$200 to \$300 a month. The hotel has been recycling its organic waste since 1998 to avoid penalties for sending overweight loads of material to the landfill.

Soiled paper, waxed cardboard, flowers, fruits, vegetables, food scraps, bakery discards, meat and bones, poultry and seafood residuals are all composted.

Smithrite provides bins, picks up and transports the waste to Sea to Sky Organics in Squamish. The company, owned by Carney's Waste Systems, uses an enclosed system to compost organic waste, producing material used to enrich soil. "It goes back to Mother Earth," said Ian Tostenson, president and CEO of the restaurant association.

The groups involved say the program could save hotel and restaurant operators up to 25 per cent in waste management costs while also delivering environmental benefits, such as reduced methane gas emissions from unprocessed organic waste. Material produced by the composting can also be blended instead of chemical fertilizers with soil.

Tostenson said organic waste is usually weighted with water, which is why removing it from other solid waste reduces landfill fees faced by businesses. He said the organic waste deposited in landfills each year could fill B.C. Place Stadium three times, or pave a 25 kilometre stretch of a four-lane highway one foot deep.

Dave Roberts, general manager of the organic recycling program for Smithrite, said the company has been collecting organic waste from Whistler and Blackcomb for two years. Diesel trucks transport the waste to the disposal site in Squamish because Greater Vancouver lacks a similar facility that can process such a wide spectrum of materials.

Roberts said soil amendments are being used by customers in Squamish, Whistler, Blackcomb and Pemberton. "And a lot of it is going into the development for the 2010 Olympics."

Mike Stringer, a senior engineer with the GVRD, said the regional district is studying composting and extracting energy from organic material.