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Benefits of Multi-Stream Recycling

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Ridge Meadows Recycling Society believes that source-separated, multi-stream recycling is the best method to handle recycling in Maple Ridge. Our position is based on our understanding that there are three essential parts to an effective recycling system; 1) Collection, 2) Processing, and 3) Manufacturing. Recycling is a cycle in which each sector depends upon the others. Separation at source, as practiced in Maple Ridge, promotes the effectiveness of the **whole** recycling system, not just the collection of material.

When discussing or comparing different collection methods for recycling, ask yourself the question, "Why are we recycling at all?" The real purpose of recycling is to substitute virgin inputs (like cutting down trees) with secondary feedstock (like recycled paper) at the **manufacturing** stage. Recycling closes the loop. It reduces the need for virgin materials, thus avoiding the energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions associated with primary materials extraction and processing.

- "Collection" is not recycling. Just because it has been taken off the curb does not mean it has been recycled;
- "Diversion" is not recycling. Poor processing "diverts" recovered materials to the manufacturers, where they may simply take a longer trip to someone else's landfill;
- "Recycling" only happens when recovered materials are made into new products.

The key to achieving the environmental and economic benefits of recycling is to keep the material circulating for as many product lives as possible.

Single stream collection, also known as "fully commingled" recycling, refers to a system in which all paper fibers and containers are mixed together in the collection truck, instead of being separated by the resident and handled separately throughout the collection process.

These "commingled" recyclables must be sorted and separated before they have any market value, and contamination is a problem. "Basically, you can't unscramble an egg," explains Container Recycling Institute executive director Susan Collins, "Once the materials are mixed together in a single-stream recycling system, there will be cross-contamination of materials and glass breakage. These issues result in increased costs for the secondary processors." Cross-contamination also results in fewer materials being recycled into new products and hence increases energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. All these costs are ultimately passed on to you, the recycler.

The recycling symbol, chasing arrows, reflects a continuing and interdependent system. Single-stream does not adequately address all three "arrows," it deals only with collection.

It's true that Maple Ridge residents are asked to do a little extra work by sorting their recycling. Yet by participating in a multi-stream recycling system they demonstrate an understanding of the value of recycling, the cost of garbage and the impact on our environment.