

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

TUESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2006 ♦ THESPEC.COM

IT'S IN THE BAG

... but shouldn't be

80%
of the city's
apartment garbage
could be recycled
but it's not

City sleuths pick through garbage to nose out a solution

BY ROB FAULKNER

Seagulls ride industrial gusts outside the Kenora Avenue waste depot as a crew with puncture-proof gloves and crinkled noses tears into garbage from undisclosed, secret city locations.

This day, trucks that look like your usual garbage trucks visit the site near Eastgate Square. Guys who look like your usual garbage men dump their loads onto the concrete floor.

To use public works-speak, in which waste is an engineering problem, this is called a waste audit.

All we're doing is sorting
garbage, I ain't going
to complain.

TINA BLACK

To others, it's garbage picking with an agenda — a smelly job that relies on staffing agencies, wages above minimum and people willing to touch stuff

most of us would rather forget.

"All we're doing is sorting garbage, I ain't going to complain," says audit veteran Tina Black. She weighs a half-full garbage pail on a digital scale and makes a note on her data sheet.

"There are worse jobs." Like...?

Well, it could be a hotter, stinkier day for Black and crewmates hired by environmental consultant firm Jacques Whitford Limited. They've done audits for years, but this one of 10 city apartments comes at a pivotal time.

GARBAGE: A3

■ 93 per cent of waste can be diverted to blue boxes, green carts or reused.

■ One-third, or about 150,000, Hamilton residents live in apartments.

■ Apartment dwellers don't recycle as much as homeowners.

■ The city has no green cart program for apartments to gather that waste.

■ The city is less than halfway to a goal of diverting 65 per cent of waste by 2008.

■ The city is studying garbage at undisclosed apartment sites to figure out how to get residents to recycle more.

GARBAGE: Apartments next

Continued from A1

The city wants to divert 65 per cent of its waste from landfill by 2008. We're around 34 per cent now, and the city hopes to hit 40 per cent this year with help from a new \$30-million composting plant on Burlington Street East.

Combined, the stuff that could go into blue boxes and green carts accounts for 84 per cent of our waste. Of the remaining 15 per cent, half can be reused, half is real "garbage."

With real garbage just 7 per cent of our waste, aiming for 65 per cent diversion is a bit like Barry Bonds hoping he hits a single.

But there's a catch: the city only has green carts in single-family homes, not apartments, where about 150,000 city residents live. To hit 65 per cent, the city must find a way to compost the annual 132 kilograms of organics in every apartment.

"We've taken everything that's there," Adam Watson, a 29-year-old policy analyst for the city, says of the samples that arrive at the waste transfer station.

Funded by Stewardship Ontario, an industry body that offsets municipal blue box program costs, the audit will track 10 random city apartments four times this year.

"We want to know how much of the organics there is, so we can design an organics program," says Pat Parker, city manager of solid waste planning.

A green cart plan for apartments should start next year, but will take several years to complete. Each building is unique so city staff will have to visit them to advise on where and how to use green carts, she says. New Toronto buildings are getting multi-port tubes to dump organics down.

"And the other big thing we'll find out," when the audit ends this winter, "is what kind of recyclables are still going into the garbage, and what we need to focus on in promotional materials," Parker says.

In the waste station, a new truck dumps a fresh heap from a secret location. Auditors don't want you to know if your waste is being watched; you'd recycle

WASTE WATCH BY THE NUMBERS

APARTMENTS

- Average apartment produces 600 kilograms of waste a year.
- 33 per cent is recyclable (paper, plastic, glass, metal).
- 22 per cent is organic (mostly food, no leaf or yard waste).
- Less than 1 per cent in hazardous waste (batteries, paint, motor oil, cleaning products).
- 44 per cent is other (bulk goods, diapers, textiles, carpeting).
- Diversion rate: 24 per cent of waste is diverted from landfill.
- Capture rate: 55 per cent of recyclables are put into blue boxes.

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

- Average single-family home produces 1,000 kilograms of waste a year.
- 41 per cent recyclable.
- 43 per cent organics.
- 1 per cent hazardous waste.
- 15 per cent other.
- Diversion rate: 33 per cent.
- Capture rate: 70 per cent of recyclables/organics go into blue boxes or green carts. The city credits the waste calendars given to households for raising awareness.

more of it if you did.

If approached, however, contractors will spill the beans. It's a two-week study this month. Contents of your garbage will stay private — they're not tabloid snoops looking for scoops.

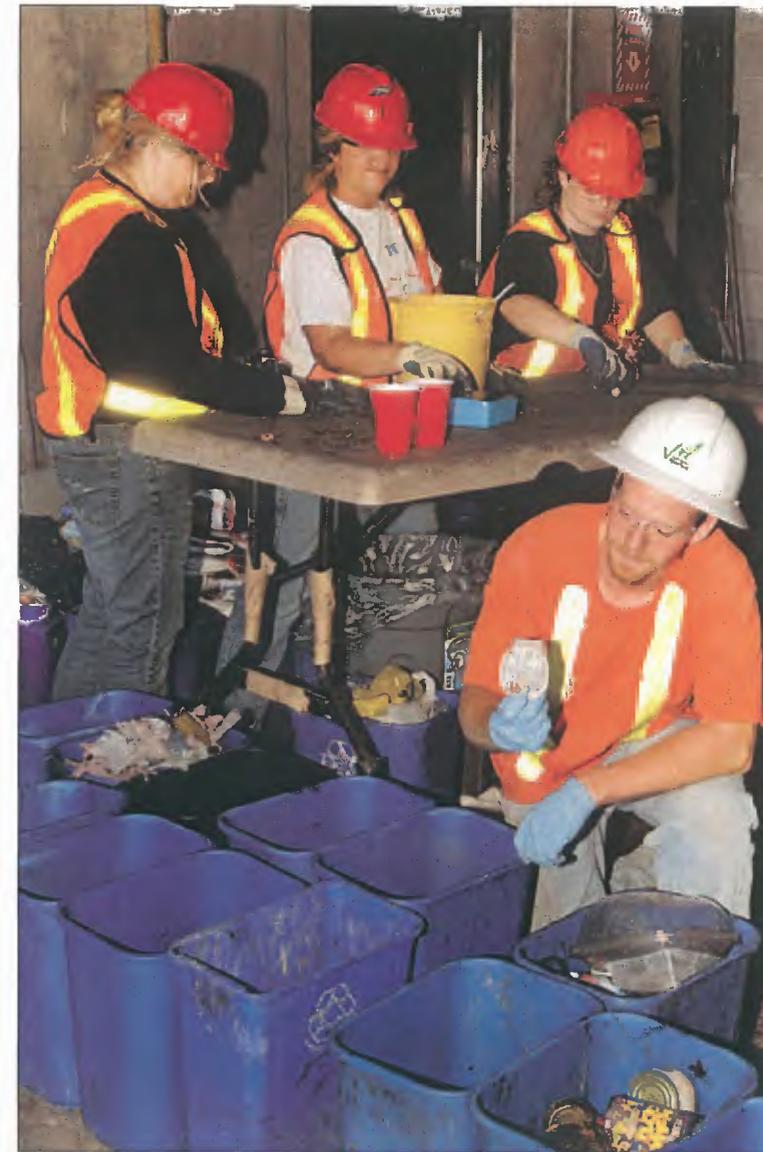
A tall, young geography grad, project leader Jim McKay of Jacques Whitford's Burlington office, watches as the temp crew sorts waste into 67 categories, each with a blue bin and a blank on his data sheets.

He's done it himself for years, and knows the risks posed by syringes without caps tossed into the trash.

Garbage experts also know a bit about apartments, versus family homes.

Without lawns, apartment-dwellers don't create yard waste; they do put their food scraps in the garbage, since they don't have a green cart.

They can anonymously put trash in a blue box, or not recycle



PAUL HOURIGAN, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

An audit of apartment waste is being conducted for the city to help design better recycling methods for Hamilton apartment dwellers. Carl Van Rooyen, front, and staff, sort garbage from 'secret' city sites.

cle, without a neighbour's scolding; they tend to move more often so may be confused about Hamilton's acceptable items.

"At my house, I can't put out waste in my recycling bin, or I'll get reprimanded," says Watson.

Stepping past orderly piles of trash from the audited buildings, goateed audit supervisor Carl Van Rooyen picks through

used Kleenex and lined chip bags, trying to explain what's truly qualifies as "garbage" these days.

It's a shrinking list.

Styrofoam, drink boxes and waxed cups can all be recycled or put in green bins, despite old bans. There's still some "garbage" like broken glass, clothing, broken crockery, paper soiled by meat stuff you'd

rather forget.

"When I first started, I got a lot of 'Ohhh, how do you do that?' I said, 'It's work,'" says Van Rooyen, taking off a blue rubber glove to shake hands.

"I have an interest in waste management. It's not just garbage to me."

rfaulkner@thespec.com
905-526-2468