

Memorandum

WMPSC-C 5-2024

Subject: 2023 Special Events Recycling & Organics Program Update

Date: February 26, 2024

To: Waste Management Planning Steering Committee

From: Emily Hughes, Waste Diversion Coordinator

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an overview of the 2023 Special Events Recycling and Organics (SER&O) programs to the Waste Management Planning Steering Committee.

Niagara Region offers free SER&O programs to local public community events throughout the year, on a first-come, first-served basis. These programs assist in diverting waste generated at public community events from the landfill and reduce disposal costs for event organizers. The SER&O programs also increase public awareness of Niagara Region's waste diversion programs at community events, which can lead to improved waste diversion practices in residential homes.

The Special Events Recycling program has been in place since 2005 and the Special Events Organics program began in 2013. The SER&O program was suspended in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resumed in 2022.

2023 Special Events Recycling Program

The 2023 Special Event Recycling program serviced events in 11 of the 12 local area municipalities. Key highlights of the 2023 recycling program include:

- 156 events serviced in 2023 compared to 120 events in 2022 representing a 30 percent increase.
- 10,808 kilograms of recyclables collected and diverted from the landfill, a 13 percent decrease from 2022*

2023 Special Events Organics Program

The 2023 Special Events Organics program serviced events in eight (8) of the 12 local area municipalities. Key highlights of the 2023 organics program include:

- 101 events serviced in 2023 compared to 77 events in 2022, representing a 31 percent increase.
- 17,530 kilograms of organics collected and diverted from the landfill, a 29 percent decrease from 2022*

*The increase in events serviced in 2023 compared to 2022 did not translate to a corresponding increase in tonnage. The Niagara Place Festival was a one-time event in 2022 that occurred over a two and a half week period which increased recycling and organics volumes in 2022 only.

The SER&O program is administered by the Waste Diversion Coordinator and supported by two Waste Management Interns.

Program Costs

The 2023 total gross cost of the SER&O programs was \$56,645, a 28 percent increase in the total program cost compared to \$44,182 in 2022. This includes collection and processing costs for recycling and organics, staff time, program supplies and promotional materials. The cost increase is mainly attributed to collection and processing of recycling because of the sale of the Material Recovery Facility to Emterra Environmental. Collection services for large events, were previously provided by Niagara Recycling as part of the Material Recovery Facility operating contract with Niagara Region. Both Miller and GFL now provide collection services for large special events, such as the Grape and Wine Festival and the St. Catharines Rotary Rib Fest because the Region does not have the in-house resources to service events of this size. These collection services accounted for \$12,602 of the total program costs of \$56,645 in 2023 compared to \$500 in 2022. This additional cost was included in the 2024 waste management operations budget.

Eco-Defenders

Eco-Defenders, a local non-profit community group provides waste sorting volunteers to public community events interested in maximizing their diversion efforts. Eco-Defender volunteers are trained by Niagara Region staff to properly sort waste and improve the quality of organic and recyclable material generated from the events. Data shows that when Eco-Defenders volunteer their time at public community events, diversion materials are free of contamination, and minimal garbage is produced. This results in reduced disposal costs for event coordinators.

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a change in the group's leadership and reduced its volunteer base which adversely affected the Eco-Defenders capacity to assist in public community events. In 2023, despite the overall increase in events serviced by the Region, the Eco-Defenders only participated in four events compared to six events in 2022 and 13 events in 2019 before the pandemic. The Eco-Defenders are working to rebuild their volunteer base for 2024.

Diversions

In 2023, staff continued to place an emphasis on post-event follow-up, diversion training and coaching for contractors, event contacts and volunteers. The additional follow up with event contacts helps to capture higher quality recycling and organic material and reduces the amount of contamination or misuse of the program. As a result, there were no events that had material sent to the landfill during the 2023 SER&O season.

As of January 2024, 19 events have already requested SER&O services for the 2024 season.

Respectfully submitted and signed by

Emily Hughes
Waste Diversion Coordinator