



MMBC causing confusion over plastics

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Coun. Kate Marsh Photograph By Citizen file

North Cowichan councillors are looking for ways to keep their residents enthusiastic about recycling as the municipality moves through the opening stages of the recently implemented Multi-Material BC program.

Shaun Chadburn, the engineering tech responsible for environmental programs at North Cowichan, made a presentation at the July 2 council meeting, talking about the differences between the new, provincially sanctioned MMBC recycling program and its locally-organized predecessor.

Chadburn explained that while some items like garden pots and trays, hot drink cups with plastic lids, plastic clamshells for salads and baked goods are now acceptable, some items, notably what is called film plastic must not be put in with recycling.

It was the list of acceptable plastics that councillors found most difficult to understand.

Coun. Kate Marsh asked specifically about plastics like the semi-hard bags that pasta comes in and said, "People are frustrated. I myself don't know what to put in from this [MMBC] list."

She wasn't the only one who raised concerns.

Coun. John Koury liked the resources available to residents through links on the municipal website but said the outreach needed to be wider than that. Looking at the MMBC material, he said, "I'm not sure if this list is in the hands of our taxpayers beyond what's available on the Internet. This gives a long description of what plastic is but it's still difficult to make a decision."

He used Ziploc bags as an example of things that can no longer be recycled, saying lots of things, such as cheese, now come in Ziploc-style bags.

"Maybe 30 per cent of the things I could put at the curb can't go in any more," he said. "I think this is a cultural shift for us." Koury suggested that homing in on information about plastics could be a good way to connect with the public, saying he agreed with a comment made previously by his colleague Coun. Al Siebring that if people become frustrated at the difficulty of recycling plastics, they are just going to put more of them in the garbage.

"We need to ramp up our communication on this," Koury said.

Mayor Jon Lefebure said that at his house, his wife, who is an enthusiastic recycler, has been cutting the ziploc part off plastic bags and putting in the rest.

Chadburn said that North Cowichan hadn't focused on the content of the recycling bags so closely before.

"There could have been a lot of contamination before," he said.

Koury agreed. "What wasn't a contaminant before is a contaminant now. We need to make it as easy as possible for people."

Coun. Marsh agreed with Koury that it's important to make sure the public has easy access to information outside of the Internet, but that the municipality should look at other ideas than an expensive general mail out.

District officials suggested that, as a start, a simple list has been included on the back of the popular collection calendar sent to property owners every year.

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