

Waste exchange helps recycling pay

Plastic garbage goes from dump to fence boards

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For years, Mike Kolankowski watched in dismay as his company collected tonnes of plastic every day to be shipped to the landfill - costing him money to get rid of it.

Kolankowski, who owns a local industrial waste disposal company, has always been able to make a buck recycling metal, wood, wire, cardboard and other detritus left behind by businesses and construction projects around the city.

But he could never find a suitable market for the huge amount of plastic his trucks constantly hauled in.

Things changed a few weeks ago, however, after his firm joined a city-sponsored project aimed at reducing the hundreds of thousands of tonnes of garbage generated by the industrial sector.

By linking up with another company that was seeking a steady supply of used plastic, Kolankowski's Allwaste Systems Ltd. is now making money off stuff that used to just eat up space in the City of Calgary's landfills -- a situation he said is now benefitting everybody.

"It's great that while there are some financial benefits, it's also good for the environment," Kolankowski said.

"The problem with the recycling business is that it often costs more to sort something than it does to dump it. You need to have an outlet for something if it's going to be profitable, and finding that outlet can sometimes be a challenge."

Allwaste Systems is one of 83 companies that have joined the Foothills Waste Exchange, a pilot project launched last year by the Clean Calgary Association and the Recycling Council of Alberta.



Roland Kyplain and Kris Shields sort trash delivered to Allwaste Systems Ltd. The company is now selling waste plastic to a Calgary manufacturer.

CREDIT: Jamie Hickey, Calgary Herald

Focusing on the 1,000 businesses in southeast Calgary's Foothills Industrial Park, the project has been gaining steam in recent months.

It has found matches for dozens of its members who are now buying, selling and trading material that may be junk to one corporation but treasure to another.

One-third of the 700,000 tonnes of garbage placed in Calgary landfills each year is considered industrial/commercial waste.

"There's a lot of recyclable material out there. The problem is finding uses for it," said Sarah Begg, the project's full-time co-ordinator.

"The crux of it for us is finding what companies have, connecting them with others and letting them get down to business."

In Kolankowski's case, Allwaste Systems recently began selling about two tonnes of plastic a day to Friendly Earth Building Products, a company that makes fences and outdoor patios out of recycled plastic.

"Until I joined the exchange, I had no idea they even existed," Kolankowski said. "They were having trouble finding a stable supply of plastic, so it's become a viable opportunity for both of us."

In the nine months since it began, the exchange has prevented 35 tonnes of industrial waste from going to the landfill and saved members an estimated \$15,000 in landfill tipping fees, Begg said.

"Now that it's really up and running, it's growing quite quickly," she said.

"The bigger the mix of companies we have, the more successful it will be."

Information about the project can be obtained on the Foothills Waste Exchange website, www.foothillswasteexchange.com, or by calling 667-6761.

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