

# Starting a Regional Waste Management System



## What is a regional waste management system?

A regional waste management system typically refers to municipalities joining together and delegating their waste management responsibilities to a central authority. The authority is a separate legal entity, governed by a board, with voting representatives from the communities and rural municipalities.

Municipalities without access to a formalized regional waste authority have found other ways to work together within a geographic boundary. For example, an increasing number of municipalities are hiring private companies to manage their municipal solid waste. Another example is when a municipal landfill accepts waste from neighbouring municipalities (for a fee) that is transported via a private waste hauler. These municipalities voluntarily decide to work together within a geographic region without creating a legal entity. Private landfills in Saskatchewan also collect and transport municipal solid waste to their private facilities. In this case, municipalities contract the private

companies to manage the entire municipal solid waste services.

There are multiple ways to provide solid waste services. It is about finding what is most suitable for your municipal situation.

Features of regional waste management systems:

- closure of most municipal landfills within the region, with only one or two centralized landfills (depending on region size) used by all municipalities belonging to the regional system;
- operation of transfer stations (temporary waste storage sites) replacing some of the landfills;
- consolidated waste collection;
- operation of recycling programs for the entire region; and
- joint public education programs.

## Why form a waste management system?

The Ministry of Environment encourages communities to consider forming regional waste management systems because they can:

- provide more efficient and economical waste disposal and recycling services;
- improve environmental performance;
- improve landfill operations;
- manage municipal liability associated with landfill operations; and
- enhance waste minimization.

Current waste management practices, while less expensive in the short term, are becoming less sustainable for both the public and government.

Many small landfills are inappropriately located near water sources, residences and businesses. Many landfills do not meet standard compaction and covering regulations and are subject to uncontrolled burning on a regular basis. These activities may cause groundwater contamination, air pollution and potential health problems. Municipalities operating landfills are liable for any contamination occurring from these activities.

The ministry regulates municipal landfills and is in the process of advising municipalities that landfills not up to current standard, will need to be replaced or upgraded. This expensive process can be more cost effective if municipalities work together to form a regional waste management system.

In addition to being less costly to operate than individual landfills, regional waste management systems have other advantages such as:

- reduced equipment requirements to run waste and recycling collection and processing systems;
- potential for expanded recycling services;
- better salvage prices for recyclable materials based on the volume produced, as well as a potential for a wider range of material collection; and
- reduced rodent populations.

### **What are the keys to a successful regional waste management system?**

#### Participation of Rural Municipalities

All future users should share the cost of building the basic infrastructure. Everyone, rural and urban, will use the system once it is in place.

#### Public Information

The more open the process, the more likely that the public will support it. Keeping everyone informed is a constant and crucial part of a successful regional system.

#### Stick to Time Lines

When implementing a regional waste management system, make sure that everyone in the region receives the service within a reasonable and clearly defined time frame. This will avoid claims of inequity and build faith in the system.

#### Fair Representation of Urban and Rural Representatives

Involved communities need to feel that they can have a voice in how the system is run. It is also important to balance urban and rural interests on the regional authority board.

#### The Need for Champions

Most new projects require committed local citizens to champion the cause. These people lead the process and keep it going when setbacks occur.

### **How do we set up a regional waste management system?**

#### Discussion

Start working with surrounding communities and rural municipalities to discuss the issue and form an interim working committee. Involve your ministry representative in the discussion. The participation of rural municipalities is crucial. If they aren't involved, it is much more difficult, if not unlikely, to form a regional waste management system.

#### Planning

- Assess current status – do you already have assets (landfills, equipment, recycling operations) that could be part of the new system;
- visit/contact other regional waste management authorities about their operations;
- develop a preliminary plan of what you would like your system to look like based on the participating population;
- decide on an affordable per capita dollar figure and build your budget around it. It may take longer to put the whole system in place, but it has to be affordable; and
- develop time lines and stick to them.

#### Communication

- Keep all municipalities informed about your progress and make sure they all feel welcome to participate in the process;
- let the public know what you are working on. You will be proposing big changes and the more they know ahead of time the better prepared they will be when the system is implemented; and
- when you have a completed plan, hold public meetings in all member municipalities. These not

only inform the public about what you plan to do, but also generate useful input on ways to modify your plan.

#### Approvals

Once the preliminary design is complete, the working committee goes back to each community to get approval to proceed. This will involve a passed motion from each interested council.

#### Implementation

- Form a legal entity (see below) and create bylaws to which all members agree;
- educate the public about how to use new system; and
- stick to implementation schedules. Changing dates causes confusion.

### **How do we form a legal entity?**

This could be a non-profit corporation (Non-profit Corporations Act, 1995) or as a municipality (*The Cities Act, The Municipalities Act and The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010*). Although it requires more paperwork, there are advantages to becoming a municipal entity:

- workers' compensation is lower;
- GST rebate is higher;
- not required to charge GST or PST on services; and
- not required to pay property taxes.

### **What are the current regulations and what is involved in meeting them?**

Any new landfills must be established to meet the ministry's current regulations under the authority of *The Municipal Refuse Management Regulations*. Developing a new landfill can include assessment of several sites, hiring of an Engineering Consultant, land acquisition, public consultation, construction tendering, site grading and access, fencing, landscaping, signage, supervision and groundwater monitoring. A post closure and long-term groundwater monitoring program must also be addressed.

## Consider joining the Association of Regional Waste Management Authorities of Saskatchewan (ARWMAS)

Regional systems currently operating in Saskatchewan have formed an association to help each other with waste management issues. You can contact them to help determine what might work well for your area from lessons learned by others. You can learn more about the overall cost from operating regions and what is needed in terms of becoming a legal entity.

### Contact Information:

ARWMAS  
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## More info?

Contact the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment Client Service Office at  
Tel: 1-800-567-4224  
(toll-free in North America)  
or 306-787-2584.  
Email: [centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca](mailto:centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca)

A closure/decommissioning plan should be in place for the existing municipal landfills in the region. After closure many of the decommissioned landfill sites may be suitable to serve as transfer stations for the regional authority.

### What are the financing options for regional waste management systems?

These can be financed in a combination of ways:

- per capita municipal levies;
- residential tag-a-bag fees;
  - charging residents a set fee for each bag of waste produced. These fees cause the heavy users of the system to pay more than those who are willing to participate in recycling and other waste diversion activities. Tag fees also provide incentive for people to reduce waste.
- commercial fees;
- charge as a utility service;
  - a regional waste management system is an excellent way to turn your waste management system into a utility by operating it on a user pay basis.
- landfill tipping fees; and
- sales of recyclable materials.
  - markets for recyclable materials vary widely. Although there will be some revenue from their sale, it is difficult to predict with any accuracy what the amount might be for any particular year. Revenues may not cover the cost to collect and handle recyclables but diversion of recyclables will extend landfill life.

### Why form a region when we can just co-operate among ourselves by sharing facilities and equipment?

A waste management region is a simpler arrangement:

- no need for the municipality to keep track of services provided and received among several communities;
- each community deals directly and on an agreed upon basis with the regional authority to come to an agreement on the level of service they will be provided;
- costs are averaged over the whole region rather than calculated separately for each community; and
- reduces the likelihood of inter-community conflict.