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War on waste moves into new battlefields

Apartment buildings and retirement residences may be reducing and reusing more in the future thanks to some innovative technologies

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As municipalities across Canada step up their war on waste, a three-stream collection system using the Molok "Deep-Collection" containers is taking its place in Canada to serve retirement centres and nursing homes, small- to medium-sized apartment buildings, schools and neighbourhood parks.

For the past 10 years, this unique in-ground collection system has been successful in several European countries including Belgium, France, Finland, Germany, Portugal and Sweden.

In Georgetown, Ont., one nursing and retirement complex of 70 one-bedroom units has three Molok containers to separate mixed waste, cardboard and household paper. It's currently used by staff only. The City of Toronto is testing the Molok containers (organics, recyclables, waste) at one multi-family housing unit, and organics collection at another. And the Village of Winston Park in Kitchener, Ont. is a further example of a retirement complex where the Molok containers are being used successfully.

Mark Hillis, Molok's general manager for North America, states: "People and agencies throughout the world are seeing the many benefits of the Molok system, including hygiene, ease of use and esthetics."

Asked about costs, Hillis says the many features of the Molok system make this a cost-saving alternative to conventional waste management systems. The capital costs of the system are easily paid for in the savings that are attained from using the system, typically 25-35 per cent. The largest MOLOK containers that are typically used in multi-residential and industrial settings are about \$4,000.

Glen Fern Avenue in Toronto is the site of an older four-storey condominium that adopted three Molok containers in 2001. The containers serve the residents, some of them seniors.

Each round container with its attractive wood siding and sealed lid sits 40 per cent above and 60 per cent below ground level where the cooler temperature effectively controls odours. Lids self close by gravity leaving no room for urban wildlife.

Instead of placing garbage at back doors for pick-up, Glen Fern residents now deposit items such as food scraps, wilted flowers and tissues in the bin for organics; all products like paper, tins and bottles in the recyclable bin, and put any items deemed garbage into the third bin.

As these residents cannot backyard compost or participate in Toronto's Green Bin program, they embrace the idea knowing that their food scraps will be made into compost. Use of the Molok system at Glen Fern has increased diversion rates to 60 per cent.

When the bin levels approach capacity, they are emptied using a hydraulic lift and the contents trucked to separate destinations. Organics are delivered to Dufferin Organics, a centralized composting facility, where food scraps eventually become a soil conditioner for markets; recyclables end up at Toronto's Commissioner Street depot, where they are sorted and processed; and the garbage heads for a Michigan landfill site.

Moloks also have potential at neighbourhood parks and sites that notably host events such as fun runs or concerts, where recyclable beverage containers and fruit peelings are discarded. They hold three times the amount and take up less than a third of the surface space required by above ground containers.

A new voluntary industry quality program for compost is being set up to ensure that high standards will be met. The Compost Quality Alliance is a program established by the Composting Council of Canada. The benefit for the customer is the ability to select the appropriate compost. A nursery, for example, would choose a different blend for delicate plants than would a municipality looking for compost to stop erosion.

During this decade an exciting industry of compost facilities and markets will emerge as we begin to separate the food scraps and other organic materials from our waste stream.

Individuals can make a difference through their purchasing power by looking for recycled content. Strengthening markets for collected recyclable materials is as important as dropping items into the blue box or recycling depot.

Reduce and reuse is key. The Future is Rs.