October

Waste Management Corner

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Redefining Waste: How Saugeen Community Can Lead the Circular Shift. Small Actions, Big Impact!

This month, I want to draw from the wisdom of the Grandfather Teachings. For decades, waste has been treated as something to be discarded, buried, or burned. But times are changing. Communities like Saugeen First Nation are beginning to recognize an important truth: waste is not just a problem but a resource. Truth reminds us to be honest about how we live today and what our choices mean for the environment and for one another. By embracing truth, we see that every bag of garbage holds value when managed properly, and it is our responsibility to use these resources wisely for the benefit of the whole community.

At the same time, **Respect** guides us to honour the land (environment), the resources it provides, and the community members who depend on it. Respecting waste as a resource means handling it carefully, sorting, recovering, and reusing wherever possible rather than discarding carelessly. It also means recognizing the important work of those who collect, sort, and process these materials because everyone plays a role in building a cleaner and stronger future. Every bag of garbage contains recoverable materials. Food scraps and yard trimmings can be composted into soil for community gardens. Plastics, metals, and paper can be processed and sold to manufacturers. Old tires can be turned into rubberized asphalt while electronics and clothing can be refurbished or recycled. Waste is not something to “get rid of”, but it is a stream of materials with environmental, social, and economic value. Investing in recycling, composting, and reuse programs, Saugeen First Nation can reduce dependency on costly landfills while generating revenue and creating jobs. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs also support this shift helping us recover more materials and strengthen local systems. Waste-based projects open doors for permanent and contract employment from collection and sorting to composting and resale.

The circular economy encourages us to keep materials in use for as long as possible, extract maximum value, and regenerate products at the end of their life. For Indigenous communities, this aligns with our cultural responsibility to care for the land. Allowing waste to pile up in landfills, forests, or ditches runs counter to these values. Treating waste as a resource, we honour our duty to protect the land for future generations. Transforming waste into a resource requires a collective shift in mindset. It begins at home with proper sorting, grows through community clean-ups, and extends into active support for local recycling initiatives. While programs and infrastructure matter, their success depends on each of us. Education and ongoing outreach are key.

Saugeen First Nation stands at a turning point, and reimagining waste as a resource we can build a cleaner environment, a stronger economy, and a more self-reliant community. Let us move beyond the old ways of discarding and embrace the value in what we once called trash. Together, we can turn waste into something powerful: a driver of growth, sustainability, and pride in our community. In the next article, we will explore what materials count as recyclables and which bins they belong in. Until then, have a great waste management day.

But remember: Together, let’s turn today’s waste into tomorrow’s wealth.