

Green bin reaches for the sky

Organic composting arrives at North York highrise and is coming soon to an apartment near you

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One down, just 4,499 buildings to go: Toronto has rolled out its green bin program for composting organic waste in highrise buildings – part of the city's scramble to divert 70 per cent of waste from the dump by the end of 2010.

Mayor David Miller kicked off the drive to add composting to the routine in highrise condo and apartment buildings yesterday at a Doris Ave. condominium near North York City Hall.

Why that particular building? The answer could be summed up in a few words: Anne-Marie Ambert, president of the condo corporation.

Ambert had been pushing for waste diversion in the building even before the city picked it as one of 30 across the city to participate in a pilot recycling program.

The result: The 23-floor building, home to 600 people, used to put out five garbage bins and two recycling bins a week.

Now it's reversed: Two garbage bins and five of recycling.

Now that composting will be added to the recycling effort, Ambert expects even less garbage to come out of the building.

Under the new program, each unit gets a small plastic bucket with a handle and lid to hold kitchen scraps for the green bin.

It also gets a small blue bin or a soft blue sack to hold

NO DUMPING

70%

Toronto's target for portion of waste being diverted from the dump by the end of 2010

61%

Portion diverted in 2008 by single-family homes

18%

Portion diverted in 2008 by multi-unit apartments, condos and co-ops

44%

Portion diverted in 2008 by all households combined

5%

Added percentage that will be diverted when all multi-unit households get green bins

60%

Estimated percentage of waste Toronto

recycling material like bottles, cans and paper.

Residents are then asked to dump their organic waste or recycling in collection bins – the location of which is up to each building's management.

expects to be diverting overall, by the end of 2010

Residents also get information about what waste goes where.

"What I hear from people all over the city is, they want to do the right thing; they just need to know how," Miller said. "Once they know, the vast majority do it."

Ambert says that in her building, what works best is having collection bins on the exit route from the building, on the ground floor.

"We just figured out if we put bins at proper places, people will be much more willing to do stuff," she said.

Although the building wasn't designed with recycling in mind, Ambert found places near the doors to place recycling bins. The condo corporation rejected the idea of putting bins on each floor

"Some residents would make a mess, it would smell; this is just the thing you don't want to do," she said.

The city will have to work fast to get composting up and running in the 4,500 multi-unit residential buildings that don't have green bins now. The aim is to have all of them on the system in 18 months, which means adding 250 buildings a month.

The incentive for residents, if conscience isn't enough, is money.

Since the summer, garbage trucks have been measuring the amount of garbage each building produces.

By reducing garbage output, buildings can reduce the fees they pay for waste removal.

Ambert says buildings similar to hers pay upward of \$30,000 a year in garbage fees; she estimates that her building may pay only about \$14,000 because of its aggressive diversion. That's a saving of about \$50 a unit.

About 75 per cent of the units happily participate in diversion, said Ambert, a retired professor of sociology at York University.

She knows exactly who diverts and who doesn't: "The fickle ones are young males – in their teenage years, and their 20s and their 30s," she said.

"I guess it's not cool for them ... especially with organic waste. You never see them carrying a little bag.

"Women and people above 40 are much more conscientious."

