

THE STORY OF ONTARIO'S BLUE BOX



Thinking beyond the box

Stewardship Ontario

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Who is Stewardship Ontario? _____	3
Ontario: Home of the Blue Box _____	4
Where Curbside Recycling Began	
Sixties & Seventies _____	5
A Movement Gathers Momentum	
Curbside Collection Begins	
Eco-Player gets Inspired at Garbage Fest	
Canadian Troops Pilot a New Program	
Finding Markets for Recyclables	
The Eighties _____	9
Kitchener Tests First Recycling Box	
The Boxes Turn Blue	
The Province Turns Blue	
Ontario's Blue Box wins Presigious UN Environment Award	
The Nineties _____	13
Ontarians Love to Feed the Blue Box	
Industry Unites for Sustainable Recycling	
The New Century _____	16
The Blue Box Welcomes the New Millennium	
Stewardship Ontario Develops the Blue Box Program	
The Blue Box Invests in Innovation	
Blue Box by the Numbers	
The Blue Box Helps a Blue Planet	
Stewardship Ontario Goes to the Grocers	
Plastic Is In	
Ice River Springs Closes the Loop	
We Recycle More Cups of Coffee	
Stewardship Ontario Discovers Exciting New Technologies	
Where to Next?	
Connect with Stewardship Ontario _____	22

Who is

STEWARDSHIP ONTARIO?

We're a not-for-profit organization funded and governed by the industries that make and market the products and packaging materials managed under our recycling programs. We operate the:

- **Blue Box** – the curbside recycling program for printed paper and packaging
- **Orange Drop** – the recycling and safe disposal program for hazardous or special waste

We touch the lives of Ontarians every day – whether they are putting something in their Blue Box or returning unused paint or spent batteries to a depot or retail partner. We work hard to keep many materials out of landfill, and to recover as much value as possible from these materials at the end of their useful life.

We strive to find new ways to turn today's waste into tomorrow's consumer products.

How do we Operate?

Stewardship Ontario collects fees from 'stewards' – the first importers, manufacturers or brand owners of the packaging and products that end up in curbside Blue Boxes or that are classified as household hazardous or special waste. These fees help to pay for the costs of collecting, transporting, recycling and safely disposing of waste across the province.

Stewards share responsibility for the Blue Box program with municipal governments, contributing approximately \$100 million per year (about half of the cost). Stewards are fully responsible for the Orange Drop program, which cost Stewardship Ontario \$42 million in 2011.

What makes us Accountable?

Stewardship Ontario operates the Blue Box and Orange Drop Programs under the authority of the Waste Diversion Act, 2002 (WDA). The organization receives no funding from government or taxpayers. Stewardship Ontario is designated in legislation as an "Industry Funding Organization" in order to make it clear that it is the responsibility of industry to fund stewardship programs for various wastes.

Stewardship Ontario is accountable to Waste Diversion Ontario (WDO), a non-crown corporation, and must meet a series of targets ranging from waste diversion to financial performance. An annual report provides detailed performance results along with an audited financial statement for public review.

Ontario: Home of the Blue Box Where Curbside Recycling Began

Not everyone knows that Ontario is the birthplace of the Blue Box. The world's first curbside recycling program made its official debut in Kitchener in 1981. Since then, Ontario's Blue Box has become a blueprint for recycling programs in more than 150 countries around the world, and has received awards for its healthy curbside appetite.

Our story begins with growing environmental awareness in the late sixties, and follows the Blue Box as it becomes a fixture at the end of every driveway. It's a story that keeps rewriting itself, as new recycling technologies make it possible for Ontario households to add more and more materials to their Blue Boxes. It's a program that is constantly evolving, as innovative companies find cost-effective and energy-efficient ways to turn garbage into valuable resources—converting waste materials into raw materials. It's an environmental initiative that adds value, as local recycling collectors, transporters and processors help to grow Ontario's green economy and keep the value of recyclables in our province. Ontario's Blue Box is shaping the future, as we divert more waste from our landfills and waterways to create cleaner, healthier, more sustainable communities for our children, and theirs.





SIXTIES & SEVENTIES



A Movement Gathers Momentum

1969

As student protests sweep the world in the late sixties, a group of University of Toronto students sets its sights on more peaceful pursuits. With the support of professor Don Chant, the students create **Pollution Probe** to build awareness of waste generation, ground water contamination and incineration emissions.

1970

Government gets eco-busy at all levels. In Ottawa, they create the **Department of Environment**, while the Ontario Government passes the **Waste Management Act** for air and waste disposal permit systems, introduces the **Environmental Protection Act** (EPA) and establishes the **Ontario Ministry of the Environment** (MOE). In Toronto, City Council creates the **Toronto Recycling Action Committee** (TRAC)—mainly private citizens appointed by Council. TRAC starts a citywide curbside collection of newspaper and begins to educate the public about the 3Rs—originally Refuse, Reuse and Recycle, and now known as **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**.

1973

The **Garbage Coalition** takes shape, bringing together over 60 groups to urge the provincial government to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce and recycle solid waste.



Curbside Collection Begins

1974

The **Is Five Foundation** (the synergy of two-plus-two-is-five) starts building innovative environmental programs. Among the first—**Project One Recycling** in the East Toronto Beaches, where foundation founder, Jack McGinnis, drives the truck that picks up glass, cans and newspapers every week from 80,000 households.



1975

The MOE builds a \$20-million resource recovery facility and appoints a **Solid Waste Task Force** which in turn creates the **Waste Management Advisory Board**.

1976

Multi-material curbside collection starts in East York to demonstrate that separating at source is better than a network of capital-intensive sorting plants. Early success leads to Canada's first purpose-built vehicle for multi-material collection and composting programs.

Eco-Player gets Inspired at Garbage Fest

1977

Garbage Fest 77 takes place in Kitchener and prompts garbage collector, **Laidlaw Waste Systems**, to up its recycling presence under the leadership of Nyle Ludolph (later known as the Grandfather of the Blue Box). Inspired by the need to divert more waste, Nyle challenges himself to change his household habits. The result? For an entire year, he only takes six garbage bags to the curb.

Canadian Troops Pilot a New Program

1977

A new program for separating recycling is tested at Canadian Forces Base Borden, outside Barrie. Combining innovative home storage and set-out techniques with an intensive education program, the one-year pilot shows that exceptional participation rates can be achieved if recycling is made as easy as garbage collection.

Finding Markets for Recyclables

1978

The **Is Five Foundation** brings together recycling enthusiasts to create the **Recycling Council of Ontario** (RCO) in Toronto. Modelled after the Recycling Council of British Columbia, the RCO helps Ontario's recycling operators market the newspapers, glass and metal cans they are collecting from community recycling depots and door-to-door drives.





THE EIGHTIES



Kitchener Tests First Recycling Box

1981

Laidlaw Waste Systems provides \$71,000 to test multi-material curbside recycling in **Kitchener**, Ontario. **Resource Integration Systems (RIS)**—a private waste management and consulting company—takes care of system design and community activation, testing a wide range of collection and motivation techniques and developing an intensive program monitoring system.

One approach involves giving householders a box to store their recyclables and to set them conveniently at the curb on the same day as garbage collection. The first boxes are corrugated plastic sheets, hand-folded into shape and hand-stenciled with the words “WE RECYCLE.”

After a year of close monitoring and evaluation, the boxes are the clear winners—the most effective way to capture recyclables. Kitchener residents near the test area who have not received a box start clamouring for one, marking the start of the public’s enduring love affair with what soon becomes known as the Blue Box.

The Box Turns Blue

Flushed with success, RIS and Laidlaw search for a more robust and professional-looking box, selecting an off-the-shelf container already used in east-coast fishing. Now to choose a colour. Environmental green? Laidlaw’s corporate red, white and blue? Or black, so that the boxes stand out against the snow? It becomes clear that a dark colour will minimize the punishing effects of ultraviolet rays. While black may be the most practical colour, all agree that the next colour on the spectrum—blue—is the best choice. So, Blue Box rolls off the tongue and the production lines.



1983

Responding to a new tender for waste collection in Kitchener, Laidlaw proposes a combined city-wide garbage collection and recycling program using the new Blue Boxes. The city wants to accept a lower bid, without recycling. The community stages a dramatic intervention. At the critical council meeting to choose the successful bid, Kitchener witnesses the largest public turnout the city has ever seen for a community issue. Kitchener accepts the Laidlaw bid and introduces the first city-wide Blue Box program. A year later, Mississauga goes blue too.

The Province Turns Blue

1985

Impressed by the success of the Blue Box program in Kitchener, a coalition of soft drink companies and packaging suppliers proposes a province-wide network of Blue Box recycling programs.

The Ontario government creates the **Recycling Advisory Committee (RAC)** to monitor refillable containers sold in Ontario, to advise on benchmark recycling rates and to promote multi-material recycling programs.

1986

Ontario soft drink manufacturers, distributors and suppliers form **Ontario Multi-Material Recycling Incorporated (OMMRI)**, an industry-funding organization, and pledge \$1.5 million toward an Ontario-wide Blue Box program.

Industry, municipalities and the provincial government create a unique partnership to build the Blue Box program, each contributing one-third of the capital start-up costs.

Industry representatives and government officials travel the province to promote the Blue Box, and Ontario businesses pay for the promotional and educational costs of launching municipal Blue Box programs.

1987

The soft drink industry increases its commitment to \$20 million over four years. Industry and government funds are used to buy recycling trucks, Blue Boxes and processing equipment, as well as to develop processing facilities.

Ontario's Blue Box wins Prestigious UN Environment Award

1989

The total number of households with Blue Box service reaches one million and visitors from around the world come to Ontario to learn more about the Blue Box program and the brokering of this unique public-private sector arrangement. The United Nations recognizes the success of Ontario's Blue Box with the first ever Environmental Award to industry.





THE NINETIES



Ontarians Love to Feed the Blue Box

1990

By the early nineties, 80 per cent of Ontario households have access to recycling services. As the Blue Box captures more materials, industry involvement and government oversight expand.

With a broader mandate, the **Recycling Advisory Committee** becomes the **Waste Reduction Advisory Committee (WRAC)**.

The soft drinks industry is joined by grocery manufacturers, suppliers and distributors, by the plastics industry, by packaging manufacturers and suppliers and by newspaper publishers. Together they agree to raise \$45 million over the next five years.

1992

The number of households with Blue Box service reaches two million.

1996

OMMRI becomes **Corporations in Support of Recycling (CSR)** and continues to work with municipalities to make recycling programs more effective and cost-efficient.



Industry Unites for Sustainable Recycling

1999

94 per cent of Ontario households have access to recycling services.

The MOE signs a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a number of key organizations to achieve sustainable municipal recycling in Ontario, and establishes the **Interim Waste Diversion Organization** (iWDO). MOU signatories are:

- The Canadian Newspaper Association
- The Canadian Paint and Coatings Association
- The Canadian Manufacturers of Chemical Specialties Association
- The Liquor Control Board of Ontario
- The Association of Municipalities of Ontario
- The Recycling Council of Ontario
- CSR:
 - The Canadian Soft Drink Association
 - Food & Consumer Products Manufacturers of Canada
 - Canadian Council of Grocery Distributors
 - Environment and Plastics Industry Council
 - Printing Paper Users Groups
 - The Packaging Association of Canada.





THE NEW CENTURY



The Blue Box Welcomes the new Millennium

2000

iWDO now includes over 100 representatives from municipalities, industry and environmental groups. In September 2000, they submit a report to the Minister of Environment, [Achieving Sustainable Municipal Waste Diversion Programs in Ontario](#), which recommends how to achieve a 50 per cent landfill diversion target and how to fund sustainable recycling programs.

2001

Municipalities, industry and government work on Bill 90, an Act to promote waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

Stewardship Ontario Develops the Blue Box Program

2002

Bill 90 passes as the [Waste Diversion Act, 2002](#), creating a level playing field for industry stewardship in Ontario. It obligates companies that introduce packaging or printed paper, managed through the municipal waste system, to pay into a fund. The fund pays Ontario municipalities a 50 per cent share of the net cost of operating residential recycling programs. The Act also establishes [Waste Diversion Ontario](#) (WDO) as a non-crown corporation to develop, implement and operate waste diversion programs for a wide range of materials, including Blue Box wastes. WDO commissions industry organization, [Stewardship Ontario](#), to develop the Blue Box Program Plan.

2003

Stewardship Ontario registers 3,300 companies as potential stewards and receives reports from approximately 1,200 Blue Box stewards.

2004

Blue Box stewards begin to file reports and pay fees to **Stewardship Ontario**. May 2004, sees the first payments to municipalities, as industry contributes its share of the net cost of operating residential recycling programs.

2005

Ontarians recycle 861,000 tonnes of packaging and printed paper through their Blue Boxes. That's 58 per cent of the materials in the marketplace and 62 per cent more than the previous year's collection. Pretty impressive for a population that only grows by 17 per cent during the same year.

2006

The Blue Box celebrates its 25th anniversary.

2009

Stewardship Ontario distributes \$60 million to approximately 220 Ontario municipalities on behalf of Blue Box stewards and collects 66 per cent of the Blue Box materials in the marketplace.



The Blue Box Invests in Innovation

2010

The Blue Box devours almost a million tonnes of waste, outpacing provincial targets by 13 per cent, and recovering 68 per cent of the materials that stewards put into Ontario's marketplace. Total contributions from Ontario businesses since 2004 reach more than \$500 million.

Stewardship Ontario drives initiatives to expand Blue Box materials and close the recycling loop by transforming more Blue Box materials into new products right here in Ontario. This creates new jobs in the green economy, lowers the cost of recycling, conserves resources, reduces carbon emissions and improves the health of Ontarians.

Blue Box by the Numbers

2011

The Blue Box reaches 95 per cent of the 13 million people who live in Ontario.

75 per cent of Ontario residents say they consider the Blue Box their primary pro-environment effort.

Ontario's printed paper and packaging diversion rate is the highest in North America.



The Blue Box Helps a Blue Planet

Canadian Tire launches an exclusive [Blue Planet](#)® Line of national products supplied by Canadian vendor [Gracious Living](#)™. The totes, step stools, drawers, caddies and even the Blue Box itself are made using some of the very materials it collects.

Stewardship Ontario Goes to the Grocers

Stewardship Ontario teams up with the [Retail Council of Canada](#) (RCC), the country's leading grocery chains and other recycling experts to remove the obstacles to recycling plastics like clamshells, bakery and deli trays, blister packaging and salad containers. It makes the process more efficient and matches the supply of grocery packaging to the recycling industry's demand for uncontaminated bales of post-consumer plastic.



Plastic Is In

Leveraging the packaging changes made possible in collaboration with the RCC, Canada's grocery retailers and other recycling experts, Stewardship Ontario works closely with municipalities to expand the number and types of material that can be collected in the Blue Box and processed effectively. The **Plastic Is In** campaign boosts the supply of materials and satisfies the increasing demand for Blue Box plastic. With a pilot in the Kawarthas, the campaign lets householders know that they can recycle all types of rigid plastic in their Blue Boxes.

Ice River Springs Closes the Loop

Ontario's [Ice River Springs](#) is the world's only bottled water manufacturer to produce its bottles in-house from 100 per cent recycled Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) plastic. The process uses bottles and grocery plastics from the Blue Box, further leveraging packaging design changes made possible by Stewardship Ontario, the RCC, Canada's grocery retailers and other recycling experts. This requires six times less energy than producing PET from scratch and generates an annual carbon offset of over 34 million kilograms.

We Recycle More Cups of Coffee

Stewardship Ontario seeks out leading technologies, and partners with [Tim Hortons](#) to find an efficient and cost-effective way of processing the laminate paper in hot beverage cups.

Stewardship Ontario Discovers Exciting New Technologies

Stewardship Ontario partners with [GreenMantra Technologies](#) and [Switchable Solutions](#), two companies seeking to commercialize innovative discoveries that have the potential to convert hard-to-recycle plastics into valuable commodities.



Where to Next?

Product stewardship and recycling are at a turning point in Ontario, creating both challenges and opportunities for Stewardship Ontario. As the legislative framework for product stewardship in Ontario evolves, there is an unprecedented opportunity to advance the environmental performance and economic sustainability of the recycling programs Stewardship Ontario manages. This will ensure consumer needs and expectations are met, while improving efficiency and creating new opportunities for Ontario businesses. As we anticipate and plan for this future, we are building a network of like-minded partners who can help realize this vision.

Sources

- CSR Archives
- Stewardship Ontario Archives
- [“We Recycle: The Creators of the Blue Box Programme.” Pollution Probe,](#)
- “RCO Celebrates 20Years!” 1998
- “The Recycler! OMMRI: Corporations in Support of Recycling.” August 1990
- [A Brief History of Waste Diversion in Ontario: The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy](#)

CONNECT WITH STEWARDSHIP ONTARIO

1 St. Clair Ave. West, 7th Floor
Toronto, ON M4V 1K6
Tel: 416-323-0101
Fax: 416-323-3185

Blue Box Connections

Email

beyondthebox@stewardshipontario.ca

Web

www.stewardshipontario.ca

Twitter

[@InnovationGreen](https://twitter.com/InnovationGreen)

YouTube

www.youtube.com/user/stewardshipontario

Orange Drop Connections

Web

www.makethedrop.ca

www.orangedrop.ca

Twitter

[@makethedrop](https://twitter.com/makethedrop)

Facebook

www.facebook.com/makethedrop

YouTube

www.youtube.com/user/makethedrop

