

# WHAT TO DO ABOUT WASTE

Alberta puts finishing touches on plan to recycle construction material

by Chaz Osburn

**Did you know that about a quarter of the waste going into Alberta's landfills is from construction and demolition projects?**

How about that the construction of an average-size home generates six to seven tonnes of waste? Or that 860,000 tonnes of construction waste went into landfills in 2006?

These figures from Alberta Environment illustrate the potential to rein in the amount of material that winds up in landfills. Yes, some construction companies recycle to meet LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification standards. But for many, it's far easier to throw everything in one bin and be done with it.

That will not be the case much longer. For the past several weeks, industry and government have been holding focus groups around a proposal to make recycling at least some construction waste mandatory.

In theory, the program could operate like a bottle deposit program. Before you begin a project, you would be required to put down a deposit, perhaps based on size (square footage), and pay an administrative fee. Then once a project is finished, you'd get a refund based on what you were able to recycle.

Obviously, there are still a lot of "what

abouts" and "whys" and "how much" to be worked out in the months ahead.

Dave Whitfield, waste reduction specialist with Alberta Environment, said his agency has worked with the Alberta Construction Association and Canadian Home Builders' Association-Alberta to develop the strategy. A program could take effect in 2010.

Among the challenges are to come up with a program that's fair to those that use it and ensuring that recycling sites exist.

Speaking at Edmonton's Buildex show in March, Dan Zembal, president of Alberta Waste and Recycling, said higher tipping fees at landfills make the economics of construction waste recycling attractive. Zembal's company operates a recycling depot north of Calgary. The depot accepts recyclable materials such as wood, drywall, and asphalt shingles.

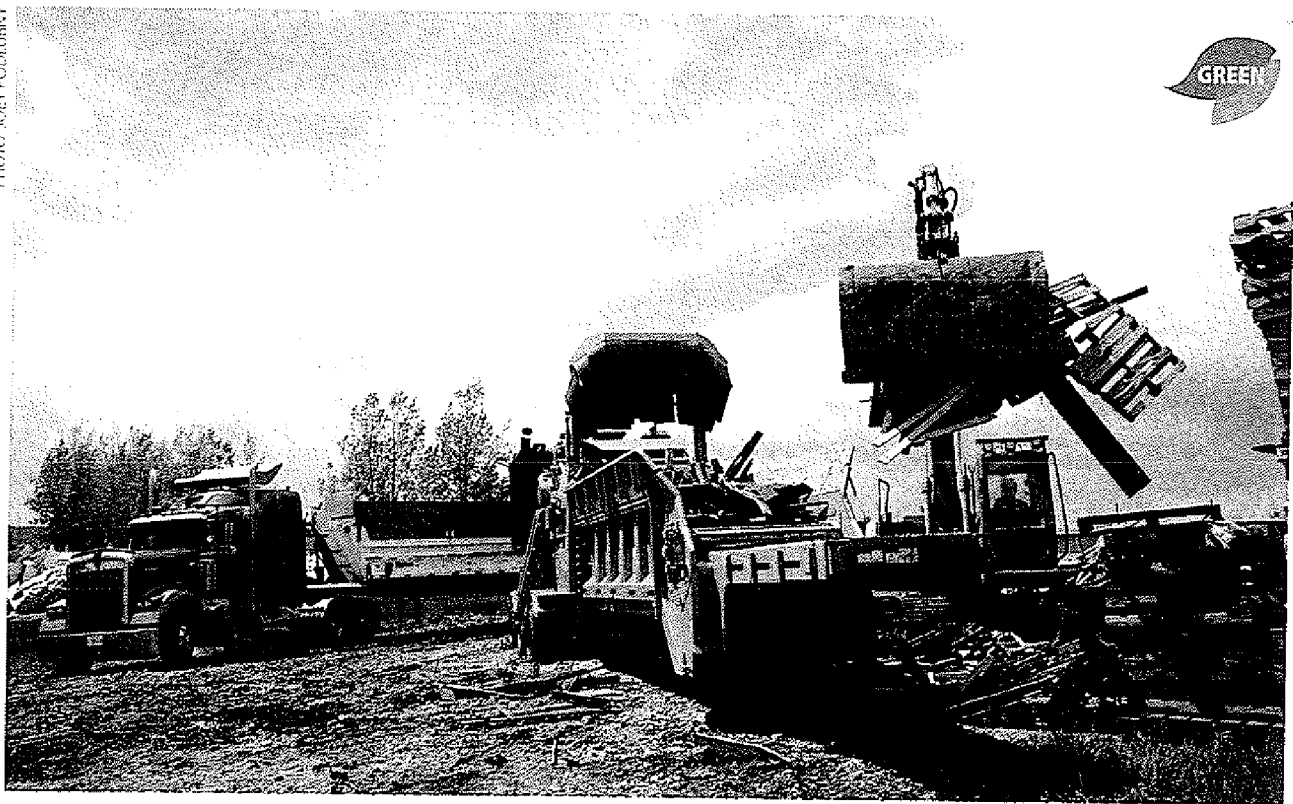
One of the ways to encourage recycling at a construction site is to offer an organized central location to put material.

"If it looks like a dump, people will dump things into it," Zembal said. "If it looks like a garden centre, they won't."

Although it takes more effort, recycling is possible. For example, when PCL Construction Management Inc. built the \$10.8-million fire services headquarters and fire station in St. Albert last year, it recycled 51 tonnes of material. The amount sent to a landfill? Only 11.5 tonnes. ©



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Alberta Waste and Recycling recycles construction debris at this depot near Calgary.