

Garbage Mining

Tapping into the waste revenue stream

by **BEN AMUNDSON**



The Depot accepts 21 different types of items from local residents - everything from wood to textiles to electronics - and generates revenue while keeping them out of the landfill. PHOTO: **CAITLIN CRAWSHAW**

GIBSONS, BC—Buddy Boyd is a garbage miner. But he doesn't need a pick axe or a thick latex onesie to do the job. Nor does he smell the way one might imagine. Boyd and his crew of seven are mostly clean and casually dressed, because they sort garbage before it goes to the landfill - keeping it out of the landfill altogether.

Boyd sees garbage differently than most. He describes what he does as “reclaiming garbage and putting it back into the community, not the ground.”

Boyd started **Gibsons Recycling Depot** 10 years ago in Gibsons, British Columbia. Resource recovery centres are a model gaining popularity around the world, and slowly being recognized by governments in British Columbia.

Gibsons Recycling Depot is British Columbia's first and largest non-government funded resource recovery park. "To date, we have never received a penny of taxpayers money to operate," says Boyd.

The Depot accepts 21 different types of items from local residents. They then transport recyclables to processors that can smelt metals and recycle electronics, plastics and paper.

"We generate revenue from the sale of clean recyclables," Boyd explains. "We scavenge or pick through mixed loads and segregate co-mingled loads into specific categories (wood, metal recyclables, textiles, etc) and generate revenue this way."

A \$34,000 Styrofoam compactor makes Gibsons the only retailer of recycled styrofoam planting pots in BC.

"We generate revenue from styrofoam and are now looking at glass as well," says Boyd. "There are no government programs we have found where we can go to get funding to purchase the innovative equipment needed to keep materials out of the landfill."

Gibsons Recycling Depot is an important model at a time when Metro Vancouver is embarking on a Zero Waste Challenge. Glenn Bohn, Communications Specialist for Metro Vancouver, explains the challenge: "The goal is to divert 70 per cent of the Metro Vancouver region's waste through recycling, composting and other programs by 2015, increasing to 80 per cent by 2020."

One of the tactics being considered by Metro Vancouver to keep garbage out of the landfill is a new waste incinerator. Metro Vancouver currently burns waste at the incinerator in Burnaby.

Ben West is adamantly opposed to burning trash in Metro Vancouver. West is the Healthy Communities Campaigner for the Wilderness Committee and has been fighting the plan to purchase a new incinerator for years. "Instead of spending billions of dollars on a waste incinerator we should not settle for anything less than aggressive waste diversion targets."

Boyd advocates for "a consumer pay model also known as 'pay-as-you-throw' for non-traditional recyclables." According to Boyd, there needs to be a cost associated with waste disposal, especially for things that are hard to recycle. It should not be a free service, because it detaches people from responsibility for the things that they buy. As it stands now, he says, "good behavior is punished for those who compost at home and use resource recovery centres." People who put in the effort to keep garbage out of the landfill are still taxed for curbside pick-up when they do not even use the service, or use it much less.

Boyd would like to see more resource recovery centres started by local entrepreneurs. A problem with leaving recycling up to big business, according to Boyd, is that profits are usurped out of the community and the process can be inefficient. Instead of creating large trucks to pick-up waste at the home, Gibsons residents can drop off their unwanted items on their way to other places. All fees at Gibsons Recycling Centre are minimal (a couple of quarters to drop off an entire car load of clothes and unwanted thrift store items). It is a rate that low-income individuals can afford. The local business sells the items back to the community and employs a small of residents.

"Operations like Buddy Boyds...are exactly the kind of thing we need to find productive uses for discarded material goods," says West.

On September 1, the Depot was invited to present to Surrey City Council. This was the Depot's first invitation to present to a regional or municipal government in the decade of the Depot's operation.

On the day I visited the Depot, Gerry Tretick, of Gibsons City Council, was seen poking his head around and asking Boyd questions about his work.

It seems that after 10 years of proof, governments may be taking the hint.

As Boyd says, "it has to start from the bottom up."

Ben Amundson is a gringo living in Canada supporting positive alternatives to status quo problems