

## Privatizing trash collection could save \$10M: study; Industry group's numbers are misleading, councillor says

National Post  
Thu 20 Sep 2007  
Page: A14  
Section: Toronto  
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Source: National Post

The City of Toronto could save more than \$10-million a year by privatizing its garbage collection, according to a study released yesterday by a waste industry lobby group.

"I'm here today to tell the Mayor and his council that they can save at least \$10-million a year and possibly as high as \$30-million a year if they agreed to contract out Toronto's residential waste collection," said Rob Cook, the president of the **Ontario Waste Management Association**, an umbrella group for the province's private-sector waste disposal firms.

Mr. Cook said the city's current fiscal crisis does not necessarily demand higher taxes or cuts to services to address an anticipated budget deficit. "Why don't we recognize a third way: an approach that could reduce costs while maintaining services," he said.

The study, carried out by the association, found that the city of Toronto is paying more for garbage pickup and disposal than it needs to because most of its workforce is made up of public-sector, unionized employees.

He said the six municipalities surrounding Toronto, which have entirely privatized garbage collection, pay an average of \$23.73 per tonne less to collect residential garbage and recycling. "Private-sector waste companies are delivering the same service for approximately 20% less than the cost of the public sector."

The study also said that Toronto is one of the last municipal governments to keep its garbage pickup an "in-house" service.

"What we found is that Toronto is seriously out of step with most cities," Mr. Cook said. "In the six municipalities surrounding Toronto ... residential collection is 100% contracted out. In Toronto, 80% of those services are handled by city workers."

The association suggested that contracting out garbage could save taxpayers \$50-million over a standard five-year contract and possibly more, if it were to sell off all or part of its fleet of garbage trucks or other waste-collection equipment.

And Mr. Cook insisted that privatized garbage collection would come "without any reduction in service." But spokesmen for the city said the association's figures were misleading and in some cases dead wrong.

"This is the first time I've ever seen these numbers ... and they're just factually wrong," said Glenn De Baeremaeker, the chairman of the city's public works committee. "When we contracted in part of the service we actually saved taxpayers \$4-million a year."

Mr. De Baeremaeker, one of Mayor David Miller's supporters on council, said Toronto already uses the private sector for much of its garbage-handling system and said the city has found from experience that the best solution is a mix of the public and private sector.

"The best way to protect the public is to have a balance of services," he said. "Some should be contracted out and we've already contracted out 100% of our [garbage] disposal, 100% of our processing. Actually, the majority of our single-family home pickup is done by the private sector."

He questioned the timing of the study, released in the midst of a battle between the Mayor and some councillors over proposed new taxes and service cuts to deal with the city's potential \$575-million deficit.

"This looks like a cheap publicity stunt," said Mr. De Baeremaeker. "Like vultures circling a carcass, people are taking advantage of a very unfortunate situation, saying: 'I have a way to make us money.'"

Mr. Cook acknowledged that the association only studied the garbage collection systems, leaving out the costs of processing and disposing of the tonnes of waste produced by the city every year, but argued that the numbers were reliable. "I challenge people to challenge my numbers," he said.

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