

The Divert NS Champion of the Environment

Creating Champions of the Environment at an Individual, Community, Educational, and
Government Level

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Executive Summary

The government has implemented the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act which recognizes and acknowledges the issues present in Nova Scotia revolving around the copious amounts of solid waste disposed of. Nova Scotians need to be educated on how to sort and recycle, which will reduce solid waste. To be responsible for taking care of the earth may seem insignificant to some, but the power is in the hands of individuals, the community, our education system, and our government. This goal is possible to attain if everyone works together for the good of the environment.

The first step that all Nova Scotians must acknowledge is that the province is producing too much solid waste. It is a fact that Nova Scotians are producing nearly 400 kg of waste per person per year and that cannot be dismissed or ignored. The issue can never be solved if it is not addressed. The second step in the action plan is to implement a learning system that revolves around informing the citizens of Nova Scotia about how the waste system functions. This means there must be different learning styles addressed for the most successful result in cooperative work throughout the province. There should be more promotion for sorting apps allowing for easy waste classification or online and in person sessions for different generational learning styles. The education system needs to teach students about the recycling system and make the environment a part of everyday conversation. Creating future champions of the environment at a young age can address the environmental issues for future generations. The government also needs to have consistent guidelines on waste disposal for the province of Nova Scotia.

Working at an individual, community, educational, and government level needs to be achieved for Nova Scotia to be a champion of the environment.

When Nova Scotia established the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act on October 27, 2021, a target was set to reduce each Nova Scotian's solid waste disposal from 400 kg to 300 kg by the year 2030. This was one of the 28 goals listed in the act (Nova Scotia Legislature Bill No.57, 2021). Nova Scotia has eight years to act, and each and every Nova Scotian must each take responsibility in this fight. Whether or not Nova Scotians decide to take action will determine the future of our province.

In 2016, each Nova Scotian generated 398 kg per person of solid waste (Government of Canada, 2020). When the solid waste was examined, it was found that 88 kg of plastics, 50 kg of paper, 15 kg of metal, 10kg of glass and 37 kg of food were disposed of as solid waste. 200kg should not have been disposed of as solid waste. If the province can reduce this amount to half, it can reach the goal. Although this may seem like a large sum of solid waste produced by individuals in this province, Nova Scotia is one of the leading provinces within Canada in waste disposal. The goal set by the Canadian Council of Minister of the Environment of reducing waste disposal at a national level for 2030 was 490 kg/ person and this goal has already been accomplished in 2016 (Government of Canada, 2020). Nova Scotia met the national goal. Nova Scotian waste disposal can be an exceptional example for the other Canadian provinces.

Despite the fact that Nova Scotia is one of the leading provinces in solid waste disposal, Nova Scotia still has work to do. The issue is that citizens of Nova Scotia do not know this is a problem and do not know how the sorting system functions. If you were to ask the average Nova Scotian what the sorting system is, the majority of people would be able to describe it, but would not be able to confidently distinguish what items go in each bin. Learning from other countries, implementing change for individuals, schools, communities, as well as the government all have a role to play, and action must be taken.

The 5 R's are the guiding principles for reducing solid waste. It is essential that every Nova Scotian understands each of the principles, and that they are followed in our homes, schools, workplaces and communities. We must understand **Refuse**, **Reuse**, **Reduce**, **Repurpose** and **Recycle** in order to have collaboration from every citizen and this is what is needed in this environmental challenge.

Looking to other countries and being open to new ideas is one step that the province can take. Germany has the best recycling rate in the world (World Economic Forum, 2017). Germany is the leading recycler of municipal waste in the European Union with an estimated recycling rate of 67% in 2019. Their program includes six color coded bins, strong government policy, and cooperation from their citizens (Holmes, 2021). Germany implemented the Green Dot system which focuses on the identification of what materials are recyclable. Nova Scotia must learn from other countries' recycling systems. Creating a clear and easier to understand recycling system in the province will help attain our goal.

The target will not be met if the individuals in Nova Scotia do not take responsibility for their own actions. There are many ways to participate and be involved. For example, downloading the free mobile application, Cumberland County Solid Waste app, for example, can help individuals of all ages learn about what sorting system a certain item belongs in. An item is searched and the application tells the user how to properly sort the item. This is a simple tool that anyone with a cellular phone can navigate. Annually, collection schedules and sorting information is distributed to all households. This is the one document that should not be recycled for one year, but posted in a place for all to see. It is a visual reminder to stop and take the time to sort the items properly. In this fast paced world, people need to slow down and check if they are unsure of where an item goes.

The Canadian government is banning single use plastics. Since the government did not reach their target date for this initiative, it is hoped to be in place by the end of 2022. The government of Canada recognizes that only 9% of plastic waste is being recycled now (Vitello, 2022). Individuals need to take responsibility for the items that they are purchasing and how they are disposing of them. Buying used and repurposed items has become very popular and one that supports the action plan. Although the government has their own plan in action for single use plastics, this does not define each person's role in meeting our environmental target. We do not need to wait for government policy to be in place, but instead individuals need to take action into their own hands. An example of this would be reusing single use plastics or finding different reusable alternatives such as plastic containers or beeswax wrap. It is often observed that people use single use plastics, such as a sandwich bag, which ends up as solid waste. If people were to reuse or thoroughly clean a sandwich bag, one of the 5 R's would be in practice.

Education can play a vital role in the process of understanding the recycling system which will in turn reduce solid waste. The Nova Scotian school system needs to focus on the 5 R's as a part of everyday learning. Earth Day is an important initiative, but students need to be engaged daily. An idea to engage students is to implement a competition within the different school boards to reduce solid waste. Recyclable items should be weighed and documented. This issue of understanding sorting recyclables within our province should be acknowledged and practiced every day. By teaching students what is the proper way to recycle, this will be knowledge that they carry into their adult life. Elementary students will need guidance, but students can take the initiative at the junior and high school level. Every school should have an Environmental Team that ensures the students of the school are educated and motivated to

recycle. Promoting environmental champions in the school setting is needed for a healthier future.

Communities have a part to play as well. There is only so much an individual can do without the help of their community to support this environmental act. There can be community clean ups and information shared on how the sorting system functions. For example, if there was an educational session for community members to attend that informed them on the sorting system, this could be vital to the older population. 21.8% of all Nova Scotians are over the age of 65 which is a large population of our province (Statistics Canada, 2021). To target the different generations and demographics, there will have to be different approaches to the solution. Taking into consideration the different learning styles and the aging population of Nova Scotians is a crucial step to a successful waste disposal system.

The Nova Scotian government has work to do too. Right now, depending on where you live, there are different collection guidelines which can be confusing to Nova Scotians (Nova Scotia Canada, 2022). Clarity and consistency is what is needed. The province needs to invest in consistent guidelines to ensure all Nova Scotians are clear on what is needed from them and their community. In some counties such as Colchester and Kings County, clean styrofoam can be recycled whereas Cumberland County styrofoam cannot be (Nova Scotia Canada, 2022). This can be difficult for Nova Scotians to navigate when the province is not at a consensus on what is defined as solid waste, what can be recycled, and how the system works.

As David Suzuki stated, “Change is never easy, and it often creates discord, but when people come together for the good of humanity and the Earth, we can accomplish great things” (Brainy Quote, 2001). When Nova Scotia reaches this goal to reduce solid waste to 300 kg per

person, per year, Nova Scotians should be proud. To reach this goal, individuals, communities, the education system, and our government need to work together and Nova Scotia will be known as a champion of the environment.

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