

## *Watching Your Waste*

*By: Janet Rose, Communications Coordinator*

*Ottawa Valley Waste Recovery Centre*

### *A Trip to the “Dump” Not Like the Old Days*

For many of us from a generation not so long ago - and those that came before, a Saturday family trip to the “dump” may bring back fond and funny memories. We’d pile a load of trash into the back of a vehicle and then load the whole family into the vehicle to make our way to the local dump. This trip was an adventure. We would dump all of our waste in one big pile and then the searching would begin. What would we see - bears or other wild animals? What would we find? What we didn’t realize at the time was the damaging impact that throwing of all this trash into one big pile was having on the environment.

Now, in retrospect we can see the negative side of these past trash habits. Unlimited and unrestricted use of open landfills created pollution causing harm to our land, air, water, wildlife and natural habitats. There was a loss of many valuable materials like metals that could have been recycled. Not to mention just the lack of concern or responsibility for the garbage that we threw away. What time has taught us is that these past habits of disposing of waste are not sustainable, especially in our ever growing “consume and dispose” world.

Our “dumps” or landfills are now carefully monitored and regulated to have the least environmental impact as possible. This includes practices like compacting the trash to take up less space, covering the landfill daily to reduce pollution, creating systems to treat and clean the water that percolates through the garbage and installing mechanisms to capture dangerous greenhouse gas. Also, we try to send as little to the landfill as possible.

So what does this mean for our trip to the landfill now? It means that we need to take a more responsible approach to our waste when we plan to dispose of things. When we are cleaning, building or renovating we need to be thinking ahead about where the waste is going to end up and sort it accordingly. Clean wood (unpainted), shingles, drywall, leaf and yard waste, recyclables and organic material can be kept out of the landfill. These materials should be sorted and kept separate so that they can be directed to the correct area for recycling or reuse. Only garbage should be heading to the landfill. It also pays to think about what can be kept out of the garbage because dumping it all in the landfill has a cost – a higher tipping fee for loads mixed with these recyclable or divertible materials, and a cost to the environment by filling up our landfill space faster.

Now, when we go to the landfill, we have the opportunity to teach our children how to be responsible for our waste and the environment and to encourage them to be stewards of the earth

and its future. I believe that these will be the great memories that our children will remember and I hope that our grandchildren will have memories that reflect a “zero waste” generation.