Nunavut's plastic problem in the bag

Thousands of dollars from plastic bag levy given back to Nunavut communities by North West Company

by Peter Worden
Northern News Services
Nunavut

Discarded plastic bags blowing in the wind is a common complaint in communities.

Every day in Nunavut thousands of plastic bags are taken from the grocery store, used once and tossed. The North West Company, the North's largest and oldest grocer, hopes a recent initiative will reduce the number of plastic bags ending up as trash around town and do some environmental good.

This year, the retailer reduced the number of plastic bags used in Nunavut and Nunavik by 1,991,178.

"The communities have done a fantastic job," said Tim Ross, North West Company general Manager for the region. "The last thing we want to see are North Mart bags blowing around the communities."

In 2011, the company started charging $0.25 per plastic bag at the checkout counter in an effort to encourage grocers to switch to reusable bags. The initiative Greener Tomorrow provided two reusable grocery bags to every household and redistributes all the proceeds from plastic bag sales back into the community. Those thousands upon thousands of quarters add up to some big bucks; this year almost half-a-million will go back to communities.

"It's only a small piece coming from everybody's pocket," said Ross, explaining how before the idea, roughly 10,995 bags were used per day throughout Nunavut. In a year, that adds up to over four million – enough bags, said Ross, that if stretched end-to-end in a chain, they would span a plastic link from Montreal to the company's northernmost store in Arctic Bay.

While almost one million bags were still used in Nunavut in 2011, in all, plastic bag usage was reduced by 67 per cent.

This Earth Day, April 22, Northern Store managers at 31 locations throughout Nunavut and Nunavik handed out cheques to hamlet officials, program managers, elders and schools who would determine where the cash would go – a total of $497,000 in plastic bag fees reinvested into community cleanups, youth initiatives, beautification projects and scholarships.

"It's not something we decide where the money goes, but we would like to see it go toward some sort of environmental initiative," said Ross.

In Pangnirtung, which will receive nearly $33,000 in plastic bag fees, SAO Ron Mongeau said since the hamlet's foreman has done an enormous amount of work cleaning up the dump, they've set their sights now on ridding Pang of toxic materials.

"We would like to be able to put together a sea-can or two of the most toxic materials in the community – batteries, computer components, those kinds of things – and make arrangements with a southern recycler to get them the heck out of this community," said Mongeau. "(Greener Tomorrow) is a great program. It gives really helps out the community."

In Iqaluit, $65,480 will help finance a greenhouse project at Aqsarniit Middle School and an elders' land program at Inuksuk High School.

Some grocery shoppers at the checkout counter may be under the impression that the $0.25 per bag is a way for the grocer to increase revenues.

"We don't gain any revenues from this. Every penny spent on bags by the customers goes directly back to the community. (North West Company) does not profit on this at all," wrote Connie Tamoto, manager of corporate communications for the company.

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GREENER TOMORROW PAYOUT

Money to be given back to Nunavut communities through North West Company's Greener Tomorrow program.

Iqaluit: $65,480
Arviat: $43,241
Pangnirtung: $32,819
Baker Lake: $31,159
Clyde River: $31,029
Igloolik: $26,656
Kugluktuk: $15,699
Coral Harbour: $15,390
Pond Inlet: $14,252
Gjoa Haven: $14,239
Cape Dorset: $13,539
Qikiqtarjuak: $11,931
Kimmirut: $6,953
Hall Beach: $5,677
Arctic Bay: $3,159
Chesterfield Inlet: $2,063

Source: North West Company

Last year, the North West Company redistributed $273,000 through the initiative, combining with this year for a total now of about $770,000.

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Iqaluit Northmart cashier Taylyn Letaeman-Holst bags a customer's groceries on April 19.

National Energy Board / Office national de l'énergie

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

Review of the application for the proposed NORTHEASTERN CANADA 2D SEISMIC SURVEY (Baffin Bay/Davis Strait)

The National Energy Board (NEB) will be holding public meetings to provide the public with the opportunity to learn more about the northeastern Canada 2D seismic survey (the Project) proposed by TGS-NOPEC Geophysical Company ASA, Petroleum GeoServices (PGS) and Multi Klient Invest AS (a wholly-owned subsidiary of PGS), and to collect oral comments about the Project.

The NEB is releasing a discussion paper that will provide information regarding the Project and will guide discussions at the public meetings. This paper will be distributed to the communities in advance of the public meetings.

The public meetings will be held from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the following communities:

- Pond Inlet – Monday, April 29, 2013 at the Pond Inlet Community Hall
- Clyde River – Tuesday, April 30, 2013 at the Tuqqayaq Community Hall
- Qikiqtarjuaq – Wednesday, May 1, 2013 at the Avviujaq Gymnasium
- Iqaluit – Thursday, May 2, 2013 at the Anglican Parish Hall

Under the *Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act*, the NEB is an independent federal regulator of oil and gas activities including offshore seismic activities in the Canadian Arctic.

For more information on the community meetings or to request a copy of the discussion paper, please contact Danielle Comte at 403-299-2731 or toll free at 1-800-899-1265.

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National Energy Board / Office national de l'énergie

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(ᐃᓗᐊᓂ Baffin Bay/Davis Strait)

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