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CROP ADVISER

Empty Pesticide Container Collection

By Russel Hurst, CCA

The environment is a hot issue, not only for Canadians, but everyone around the world.

Environmental regulations, policy and resource protection topics have become significantly more prevalent. Issues such as global warming and greenhouse gas emissions have been hotly debated on a daily basis. We are increasingly concerned about sustainability and are constantly examining ways we can help protect our planet. Across all industry sectors, consumers are demanding the highest standards in food production and environmental stewardship. Together with farmers, the Canadian agriculture industry continues to build on its commitment to environmental protection and sustainability, which have been key components of business for many years.

Truth be told, the agriculture industry has been at the forefront of initiating and undertaking sustainable business practices and exhibiting a heightened level of awareness of potential production risks for quite some time, not to say that more cannot be done. Through industry leadership including that of many Ontario Certified Crop Advisers (CCAs), several programs are helping to make a difference, such as the empty pesticide collection program showcasing the industry's commitment to both human health and environmental safety.

Over the years, the empty pesticide container collection program is a stewardship initiative undertaken on behalf of the industry that many producers and industry professionals have participated in, but many don't fully understand the significance and importance of the program.

Empty Pesticide Container Collection in Canada

Since the program's inception in 1989, more than 70 million empty plastic pesticide containers have been safely collected and recycled.

Approximately six million empty containers are collected at over 1,100 designated collection sites throughout rural Canada each year. In Ontario alone, there are over 250 sites, based at participating ag-retail facilities collecting over 600,000 containers in 2006.

A key component involving the human health, environmental safety and responsible use of crop protection products is that all containers must be **triple-rinsed** before being returned to collection sites, thus ensuring the safety of everybody involved. To date, rinse rates of empty pesticide containers collected at ag-retail sites across the country have been impeccable, showing the agriculture industry's overall commitment to product stewardship.

The empty containers upon being collected are consolidated, shredded, processed, refined and transported to various recyclers across the country where the granulated plastic is used for several low-impact end-uses including field drainage tile, guard rail spacers, energy and in the past, farm fence posts.

Industry Partnership Toward a Common Goal

A key factor in the widespread success of the empty container collection program and associated return rates has been the participation of various industry stakeholders. The ag-retail industry has played a vital role in the development and implementation of the program. Through leadership, advocacy, education and by providing the necessary collection facilities, the ag-retail industry has provided a means for environmentally responsible commercial applicators and farmers to participate in the voluntary industry-led program.

Canadian farmers, through their participation in the container collection program over the years, are clearly in support of the

environmentally conscientious initiative. In 2006, a return rate of over 73% of all containers shipped into the marketplace was achieved; a voluntary recycling rate that many blue box programs would consider off the charts.

A Global Leader and Aiming Even Higher

As with any initiative, when success has been achieved, the next step is to build on that success. Over the years, the Canadian empty container collection program has been the world leader in the development of a sustainable empty container collection and recycling program. Furthermore, Canada is one of the global leaders in empty container return rates – a rate that many nations strive to attain. As the next step in the program with continued effort and support, a national voluntary recycling rate of 80% is well within reach.

Every Return Makes a Difference

The collection program is very easy to participate in – every return does make a difference. Upon using crop protection products: triple-rinse the empty pesticide containers, remove the paper booklet and return the clean, empty plastic container to a designated ag-retail collection site.

Thanks to the leadership provided by the various industry stakeholders who support the collection program and the numerous CCAs that provide leadership, technical expertise, environmental awareness and provide guidance to crop producers, the collection program is firmly rooted in the agricultural landscape for many years to come. This is an achievement that showcases the Canadian agricultural industry's commitment to environmental stewardship, resulting in an empty pesticide container collection program that the whole industry can be proud of.



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There are over 500 Certified Crop Advisers (CCA) in Ontario. Each CCA has demonstrated their knowledge about Ontario crop production by passing the required exams. In addition, they have the crop advisory experience, the education, the commitment to continuing education and have signed a comprehensive code of ethics, which places the grower's interests first.

This industry driven program helps ensure that Ontario crop producers are well served by those providing their crop production advice. This article was written by one of those CCA's.