

First load of recycled twine makes history

Jennifer Isaac, Mountain View Gazette, March 13, 2012

Mountain View Regional Waste Commission (MVRWC) recently made history for being the first Canadian organization to ship a load of reclaimed agricultural twine to a Minnesota-based company.

The 38,900 pound shipment – which represented five years' worth of collection – was loaded on Feb. 7 for delivery to Bridon Cordage, where it will be recycled into a product called Revolver Twine, consisting of mostly post-consumer baler twine.

"This demonstrates that we are leaders in the recycling of agricultural plastic," said Al Molnar, chair of the MVRWC.



JOB WELL DONE - MVC Sustainable Agricultural Specialist Amber Hines (third from left) joins Don Reid (CAO, Mountain View Regional Waste Management Commission), David Whitfield (Waste Reduction Specialist, Alberta Environment), Christina Seidel (Executive Director, Recycling Council of Alberta) and Jack Walton (MVRWMC Operations Supervisor) in recently seeing off the first truck carrying 38,900 lbs worth of agricultural twine bound for Minnesota to be recycled. This was the first truck load of its kind to leave Canada. To help with this goal, the County features an incentive program run by the Ag Services Board that pays \$100 to MVC producers who bring in a minimum 100 kgs of waste plastic for recycling. The program pays the first 100 producers who bring in ag plastics before an October deadline. To date, the program has been bringing in about 20,000 kg of ag plastics (including twine) per year.

The commission's twine collection program operates in conjunction with Mountain View County, which started an incentive program that pays residents to bring in their agricultural plastics.

"Each year of this program, Mountain View County has paid \$100 to the first 100 county residents who bring in 100 kilograms of clean agricultural plastic in a clear plastic bag," added Molnar. "This program has resulted in the recycling of approximately 20,000 kilograms of agricultural plastics per year."

The commission was paid \$5,100 for the shipment, which will go back into their operations account.

Recyclers have been seeking solutions for twine for many years, said Dave Whitfield, regional waste reduction specialist with Alberta Environment and Water and a member of a working group on agricultural plastics, established by the Recycling Council of Alberta. MVRWC is a part of that group.

"The concerns have been about collection at the farm level, contamination from dirt and manure, moisture levels and cross-border shipping," Whitfield said. "Any material that will be used in the manufacturing of another product – as virtually all recycled materials are – must meet tight specifications."

Material not meeting specifications, he said, will be rejected at a substantial cost to the community shipping it.

"The significance of the recent shipment by the commission is that it has proven the challenges can be met and it opens the door for other communities to do the same."

Used twine can be a problematic material, he added.

"On the farm, it wraps around moving parts of equipment and can be ingested by livestock," Whitfield said. "At landfills, it wraps in equipment mechanisms and causes substantial downtime."

Burning twine is not a solution, because it's illegal and dangerous both to human health and the environment, he noted.

"Programs like the one operated by the MVRWC provide farm operators with a safe management option that allows recovery of a resource," he said.

The program also keeps plastic out of the waste stream and extends the life of the landfill, Molnar noted.

Several municipalities throughout Alberta have been collecting twine and other agricultural plastics, said Whitfield. "None, to my knowledge, have collected the amount that Mountain View County has," he said. "Rocky View County has also been a pioneer in this area and has contributed to this project through development of successful techniques for on-farm collection. Interest is growing rapidly and I understand that a number of communities in northern Alberta have started collection programs."

Access to a recycler in North America helps add stability to the market for twine.

"The added advantage is that the twine is being used in the manufacture of new twine, which local producers will be able to purchase," Whitfield said. "It is only through purchasing a recycled product that we make recycling sustainable."

He added that Bridon Cordage was "very happy" with the quality of the material. "They're looking forward to receiving more."

Mountain View County's incentive program will begin again on April 1. "The plastic has to be dropped off at the Olds Transfer Station," said Molnar. "This has been an annual program for the past five years, but is dependent on the county running the program. However, MVRWMC will accept the plastic, regardless."