

Supporting Plastics Innovation in Alberta

Issue

Biodegradable plastic beverage containers present an opportunity within the existing recycling infrastructure to enhance sustainability and promote effective waste management.

Background

Alberta has made significant strides in waste management and recycling initiatives, aiming to mitigate the environmental impacts of plastic waste including through circular economy initiatives. In February 2023, the Province announced investments of \$58 million for circular economy projects through Emissions Reduction Alberta (ERA) to projects across Alberta that are worth a total combined investment value of \$528 million.¹

Single use plastic beverage containers remain a challenge due to their slow decomposition rates and adverse effects on ecosystems. Biodegradable plastic offers a promising alternative by decomposing under the right conditions.

There are several agencies that service beverage container recycling in Alberta, including the Beverage Container Management Board (BCMB), the Alberta Bottle Depot Association (ABDA) and the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation (ABCRC). According to the BCMB they are “responsible for regulating Alberta’s beverage container recycling system, and leads the development of policy and programs that enable the recycling of beverage containers in Alberta.”² BCMB’s mandate is to “To regulate and enhance a leading beverage container system that protects Alberta’s environment.”² The ABCRC “oversees the collection and recycling of more than 150,000 different types of regulated, non-refillable beverage containers sold in Alberta.”³ The ABDA has “over 200 Bottle Depot Members serving all areas of the province – these independently owned and operated businesses are part of a regulated system that ensures all types of beverage containers sold in Alberta are returned for recycling.”⁴ These agencies play a crucial role in managing beverage container recycling, providing an ideal platform to introduce biodegradable plastic beverage containers.

In 2020, the governments of Alberta and Canada, along with other partners, announced investment dollars into additional capacity for product development at TerraVerdae. This capacity is to be used for “fully biodegradable, high-performance bioplastics.”⁵

There is an opportunity for the provincial government to work with the BCMB, ABCRC, and ABDA, as well as beverage manufacturers, waste management companies, and other relevant stakeholders to support and integrate biodegradable plastic beverage containers within the recycling system. This will allow Alberta to take an innovative step towards addressing the environmental challenges posed by traditional plastics.

¹ <https://www.bcmb.ab.ca/about/>

² <https://www.abcrc.com/>

³ <https://www.blg.com/en/insights/2021/01/local-resource-recovery-drives-bioplastics-standards-globally>

⁴ <https://www.abda.ca/about>

⁵ <https://albertainnovates.ca/news/new-investment-boosts-bioplastics-product-development-capacity-at-terraverdae/>

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta work with relevant stakeholders and industry including the Beverage Container Management Board and the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation to:

1. Jointly develop strategies for identification, collection, transportation, and processing of biodegradable plastic beverage containers to ensure a seamless integration within the recycling system.
2. Launch public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the benefits of using biodegradable plastic beverage containers and how to properly dispose of them within the existing recycling system.
3. Consider the use of biodegradable plastic alternatives for single use items.