

Part 2 - Ontario's Curbside Recycling Program – Explained

The **Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016 (RRCEA)** is Ontario's primary legislation for transitioning the province from a traditional "take, make, dispose" waste model to a **circular economy**, where materials are reused, repaired, recycled, and kept in use for as long as possible. One of the most significant changes under this legislation is the transfer of responsibility for the Blue Box recycling system from municipalities to the companies that produce packaging and paper products.

Purpose of the Act

The RRCEA was passed in **2016** to:

- Increase waste diversion and recycling.
- Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfills.
- Make producers responsible for the products and packaging they introduce into Ontario.
- Encourage businesses to design products and packaging that are easier to recycle and generate less waste.
- Create a more sustainable, circular economy.

The Act replaced the former **Waste Diversion Act, 2002**.

Key Principles

1. Producer Responsibility

Instead of municipalities paying for most recycling programs through property taxes, the companies that produce or import products and packaging become financially and operationally responsible. These producers must, collect recyclable materials, transport them, process, and market recyclable materials, and meet recycling performance targets established by Ontario. This system is called **Individual Producer Responsibility (IPR)**.

2. Circular Economy

The legislation encourages products to be, reused, repaired, recycled, and remanufactured rather than disposed of after a single use.

3. Resource Recovery

The goal is to recover valuable materials before they become waste. Some examples may include paper, cardboard, plastics, metals, glass, electronics, batteries, and tires.

Blue Box Transition Timeline

Although the Act was passed in **2016**, the Blue Box transition occurred several years later.

In **2016**, the Recovery and Circular Economy Act was formally passed into legislation.

In the years **2018–2019**, Ontario began developing new regulations. Stakeholder consultations occurred with municipalities, producers, recycling companies, and residents.

In **June of 2021**, the Province finalized the Blue Box Regulation (**O. Reg. 391/21**)

This regulation officially set the transition to producer responsibility.

On **July 1, 2023**, the first municipalities transitioned. Producer organizations began operating local recycling systems instead of municipalities.

From that date to the end of **2025**, hundreds of municipalities transitioned in phases, with each municipality having an assigned transition date. Municipal recycling contracts were terminated, and new contracts were entered into between the companies performing the recycling pick up and Circular Materials.

December 31, 2025, was the final transition date deadline. By this date, every eligible Ontario municipality was to have transitioned to the new program. The Producers became fully responsible for residential Blue Box recycling,

Municipalities no longer operated or financed Blue Box collection unless they have separate service agreements with producer organizations.

Who Oversees the Program?

The program is overseen by **Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority (RPRA)**. This body is Ontario's regulator with the primary responsibility to register producers, monitor compliance, audit producers, enforce regulations, and report performance.

Circular Materials

Most producers have joined **Circular Materials**, a national not-for-profit producer responsibility organization. Circular Materials now coordinates recycling collection and processing for much of Ontario on behalf of its producer members.

What Municipalities Are Still Responsible For?

Municipalities remain responsible for such things as garbage collection, landfill operations, leaf and yard waste, compost/green bin programs, bulk waste, household hazardous waste, and local education regarding these programs.

What Is Included in the Blue Box?

While accepted materials can vary slightly by community, the producer-run program includes paper, newspapers, cardboard, boxboard, metal food cans, aluminum cans, plastic bottles and containers, cartons, glass bottles, and jars. Many municipalities have more standardized accepted materials than under the previous municipal systems.

How Municipal Finances Are Affected Before the Transition

Before the Blue Box transition, municipalities paid a significant share of costs for collection, processing, marketing recyclables, education, and administration. These costs were supported primarily through property tax levies each year.

How Municipal Finances Are Affected After the Transition

Eligible Blue Box costs shift to producers.

Municipalities may realize savings by no longer funding those services directly, though the overall financial impact varies depending on existing contracts, staffing, and local waste operations. Municipalities may still incur some transition-related costs or continue providing certain services

under a direct contract to producers. The type of program would be determined by the Council of the local municipality.

Why the Act Matters

The legislation is intended to:

- Reduce pressure on municipal budgets by shifting eligible Blue Box costs to producers.
- Increase recycling rates through province-wide performance standards.
- Encourage packaging that is easier to recycle.
- Reduce landfill use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- Support Ontario's transition to a circular economy by keeping valuable materials in use.

Under **Ontario's Blue Box Regulation (O. Reg. 391/21)**, the transition to producer responsibility occurred in **phases between July 1, 2023, and December 31, 2025.**

The schedule was based on factors such as existing municipal recycling contracts, logistical planning, producer readiness, and the transition dates assigned by regulation rather than simply by municipality size.

What about 2026?

Beginning in **2026**, Ontario is **not** beginning the transition of smaller municipalities. Instead:

- Producers are now responsible for operating the Blue Box program across Ontario.
- Communities that have already transitioned continue under the producer-operated system.
- Municipalities may still be working with Circular Materials or other producer responsibility organizations to refine service delivery, educate residents, or complete administrative matters, but these activities are part of the ongoing operation of the program—not the transition itself.

Ontario has now completed the province-wide transition of the Blue Box program to producer responsibility. Municipalities—including smaller communities such as Iroquois Falls—now collaborate with producer organizations like Circular Materials to help ensure residents continue to receive reliable recycling services. The focus is no longer on whether communities are transitioning, but on working collaboratively to make the producer-operated recycling system function effectively for residents.

Why This Matters for Iroquois Falls

For residents of Iroquois Falls, this means that Blue Box recycling is now part of Ontario's producer responsibility framework. While the municipality continues to play a key role in communicating with residents, coordinating locally, and supporting waste management services, the legal and financial responsibility for collecting and managing Blue Box materials now rests with the producers through organizations such as Circular Materials.

As our community moves forward with curbside recycling, the emphasis should be on ensuring residents receive a dependable, well-communicated, and efficient service while working collaboratively with the organizations responsible for delivering Ontario's producer-operated Blue Box program.

The success of curbside recycling in Iroquois Falls will depend on effective communication, resident participation, and effective collaboration between the municipality, Circular Materials, and the producers responsible for the program.

By understanding how Ontario's Blue Box system now operates, residents can be confident that recycling remains an important community service—one that is now funded and managed under Ontario's producer responsibility framework rather than through the traditional municipal model.

Sources:

1. Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy

[Strategy for a Waste-Free Ontario: Building the Circular Economy | ontario.ca](#)

2. Blue Box Recovery

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/210391>

[O. Reg. 391/21 BLUE BOX | ontario.ca](#)

3. Circular Materials

[Circular Materials: Advancing the circular economy](#)

4. Resource Recovery

[Resource Recovery and Circular Economy Act, 2016, S.O. 2016, c. 12, Sched. 1 | ontario.ca](#)

5. Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority (RPRA)

[Home - RPRA](#)