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New Blue Box program put business interests ahead of protecting the environment

Toronto, Ont. – Today, Minister Yurek [announced changes](#) to Ontario’s Blue Box recycling program. Unfortunately, this long-awaited shift of responsibility for Blue Box recycling from municipalities to the businesses who make, use and sell packaging will do little to reduce plastic pollution. Known as “extended producer responsibility,” the announcement signals that the new rules are light on measures to reduce plastics that end up in landfills, incinerators and the natural environment.

“This regulation has low targets, broad categories and poor reporting requirements,” said Emily Alfred, Waste Campaigner at the Toronto Environmental Alliance. “That means companies will still be able to churn out mountains of non-recyclable packaging destined for burial or burning and face no consequences.”

Nearly two-thirds of Ontario’s waste -- from workplaces, malls and institutions like universities -- is not covered under the new regulations. The Minister also indicated that, after consultation with businesses, recycling targets were lowered to make it easier for businesses to achieve them.

“It is clear that businesses have spent the last few months lobbying the Ontario government to weaken the new rules,” said Karen Wirsig, Plastics Program Manager at Environmental Defence. “EPR is supposed to make businesses change their practices to reduce throwaway packaging. What we’re actually getting here is partial and unaccountable producer responsibility. Unfortunately, Ontarians can expect little improvement for the environment with the new program.”

Environmental groups continue to be concerned that the targets for plastic recycling are too low and will mean that companies will still be able to produce and sell non-recyclable plastic films and bags, as well as dark-coloured rigid plastics, and send them for burning in an incinerator or buried in a landfill at the end of life.

“The program does not require producers to take responsibility for toxic contents of their materials, prevention and precaution through product innovations,” said Olga Speranskaya, Co-director at Health and Environment Justice Support. “This undermines the effective EPR approach and results in toxic additives contaminating the recycling stream and the environment.”

"The government missed a big opportunity to move towards a good EPR framework and increase responsibility on producers to manage plastics and paper from products that can have devastating impacts on our environment and health," stated Fe de Leon, Researcher with the Canadian Environmental Law Association. "Instead, Ontario will languish in uncertainty without high targets for collection and lack of incentives in the EPR framework to push for innovative product and packaging designs to make this program meaningful."

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