

News Release

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East Coast Trail Association (ECTA) and City of St. John's launch campaign to clean up plastic bags:

The East Coast Trail Association (ECTA) and the City of St. John's today announced a joint campaign to clean up plastic bags littering the Sugarloaf Path near the Robin Hood Bay regional landfill site. The campaign will extend to encouraging the public to sharply reduce their use of plastic shopping bags.

ECTA President Randy Murphy said at a press conference Wednesday that windblown plastic from the landfill has littered a 500 meter section of the trail for years, creating an area known as 'the plastic forest.' "Since we upgraded this trail to first class standards last year, it has become increasingly imperative that we address this issue once and for all," he said.

Over the next three weekends, ECTA will organize volunteer cleanup events each Saturday morning. ECTA members of the general public, environmental groups, municipalities, government offices, and retail business are all being invited to participate. "This will be a consciousness raising as well as a cleanup campaign," Murphy stated. Please call the ECTA office at 738-4453 if you wish to register for the cleanup campaign.

Mayor Dennis O'Keefe said the City fully recognizes the need to clean up the plastic litter coming from the landfill. "We are presently engaged in major changes at the landfill," he said. "Among other things, we are explicitly concerned about reducing and controlling the impacts on the East Coast Trail. We can't control our strong Newfoundland winds, so we have to do more to control bags and other litter at source," he said. The Mayor stated that the City intends to include plastic bags in its curbside recycling program, slated to begin in 2009.

Murphy praised the City for its cooperation in assisting ECTA in its cleanup efforts. "The City was a significant financial partner in developing the Sugarloaf trail, and has been totally supportive in meeting the challenge to eliminate the 'plastic forest'," he said.

Murphy cited environmental damage to marine and coastal life as an additional reason to clean up, control and ultimately eliminate plastic litter. ECTA is seeking the cooperation of environmental groups in the campaign. The issue of plastic bags on the

trail has prompted ECTA and the City to expand their campaign beyond cleanup and waste management practices. "The ultimate solution must be a dramatic reduction in 'use and toss' plastic shopping bags," Murphy said. He pointed out that there is a global movement in this direction, with various forms of taxation, user-pay charges, and outright banning of plastic bag use in such places as Ireland, Ontario, and San Francisco.

ECTA is not yet calling for such measures in Newfoundland, "but we need to consider all options," Murphy said. He commended supermarkets and other retailers for offering reusable bags. "Ultimately it's up to the consumer to be really serious and consistent about just saying 'no thanks' when offered disposable plastic bags, and having their reusable bag at the ready," Murphy said.

Say "No" to plastic bags! Bring your own bag!

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Mayor Dennis O'Keefe, City of St. John's and Randy Murphy, President, East Coast Trail Association