

# **Composting in the Arctic: *The Iqaluit Experience***

by  
**Erin Brubacher and  
Gladis Lemus**

Garbage in Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital is a growing problem. In the past, as in many isolated northern communities, garbage was dealt with by open burning, creating a good deal of air pollution and public health concerns. In 2001, a group of citizens lobbied to put an end to open burning; successful in their efforts, members of this group formed The Iqaluit Recycling Society.

A preliminary waste audit done for the City of Iqaluit in 2002 stated that 70% of Iqaluit's waste stream was either organic or paper waste. If just 50% of this portion of waste were diverted, the annual waste stream could be reduced by up to 1750 tonnes.

With the help of The Iqaluit Recycling Society, Mr. Jim Little, (a dedicated compost enthusiast and the Earth Day Coordinator for Nunavut) put together a pilot project in the form of a composting contest between students from Iqaluit schools. The purpose of the pilot project is to determine the viability of composting as a waste diversion option in Iqaluit. This contest is not only answering questions about waste diversion but is also offering the participants sound environmental principles akin to the Inuit traditional practice of not wasting anything and living in harmony with the environment. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association and Canadian North have generously agreed to send the top two participating students to a week long summer camp of their choice in Ontario this coming summer as a reward for being leaders in environmental protection.

With the help of the City of Iqaluit, once a week Mr. Little collects and weighs all of the compost, separated recyclables and general refuse from the 87 participating households. So far, the composting pilot has been a great success. The 111 participating students from these 87 families have diverted 3820.5 pounds of organic waste from the landfill in just 6 weeks. That is 27.5% of the participants' entire waste stream. We have found that the volume of organic material diverted has increased every week as the participants learn just how much of their waste can in fact be composted.

In the coming months we will begin the actual composting process. The theory is that we can use our arctic climate as an asset to composting as it may allow us to limit the actual composting period to the late spring and summer months, the temperature preventing the compost pile from going anaerobic in the interval. The pilot project will provide an accurate measure of the organic material that can be

diverted from our waste stream at source as well as the impacts of our climate on the cost of the required composting infrastructure. A parallel project will measure the amount potentially diverted from industrial and commercial sources.

We have come a long way over the past three years. The burning of harmful materials has come to an end and many of us have made great efforts to limit the amount of waste being sent to landfill by recycling and now composting. Projects such as this are firm steps towards waste reduction and the promotion of hands-on environmental education for younger generations.

Please forward any inquiries or offers of equipment donations to:  
[igaluitrecycles@yahoo.ca](mailto:igaluitrecycles@yahoo.ca)