



History of the Blue Box



The very first curbside Blue Box collection program was launched on September 26, 1983 in Kitchener, Ontario.

1970's

- Environmental awareness was growing in our community. Several community recycling initiatives were operating, such as the Mennonite Central Committee's drop off recycling program for steel cans, glass and newspapers, and the Boy Scouts' paper drive.

1980's

- **In 1981, the Blue Box text pilot.** The contract for Superior Sanitation (Laidlaw) was extended on the condition that they start a recycling program in Kitchener. Nyle Ludolph spearheaded this initiative, and launched a recycling pilot on September 17, 1981 in the Kitchener Centre Ward. Over 1,000 homes were asked to sort steel cans, glass and paper from their garbage, and place alongside garbage at the curb for collection. Within the test area, 250 homes were given a "special" blue box container. The colour blue was chosen because it was easy to identify at the curb. Mr. Ludolph had the logo "WE RECYCLE" printed on the very first blue boxes to encourage participation and, this logo is still on the Region's blue boxes! The amount of recyclables collected in the first month were triple what was expected! Letters were received daily requesting the program and the blue box. "Enthusiasm toward source separation recycle programs was elevated substantially with this pilot", Nyle Ludolph speech notes, May 1983.
- **In 1983, the very first Blue Box program.** Kitchener launched the program city-wide, to 35,000 homes and reported that 75 per cent of the homes were participating within the first month.
- **In 1985,** new legislation aimed at promoting recycling, allowed aluminum and plastics to enter the soft drink container market.

- **In 1986,** an initiative between the province and a soft drink and packaging coalition helped establish and partially-fund municipalities in starting Blue Box programs.

1990's

- **In 1990,** the Region launched the Multi-residential Cart Recycling program to help residents in apartment buildings and townhouses recycle.
- **In 1991,** corrugated cardboard and telephone books were added to the list of acceptable items to the Blue Box program. By the end of 1991, all seven municipalities within the Region of Waterloo had implemented Blue Box programs. In 1991, the Materials Recycling Centre (MRC) was built at our Waterloo site, the first community sized sorting centre in Ontario.
- **In 1994,** Ontario had new legislation requiring municipal curbside Blue Box programs, as well as recycling programs at multi-residential buildings.
- **In 1995,** more materials were accepted in our recycling programs. Aluminum foil trays and wrap, household fine paper, magazines, and catalogues were added in February, and box board (such as cereal and cracker boxes) in October.

2000's

- **In 2002,** empty paint cans, empty aerosol cans, grocery and retail shopping bags, all plastic tubs and bottles numbered  were added to our program.
- **In 2005,** cartons, such as drinking boxes and milk cartons, were added to the recycling program.
- **In 2009,** an addition and new equipment for the MRC increased doubling processing capacity to four metric tonnes per hour or 70,000 metric tonnes per year.

2010's

- **In April 2012**, we renamed our sorting facility to Nyle Ludolph Materials Recycling Centre, (NLMRC) in honour of the "Father of the Blue Box".
- **In 2014**, the list of acceptable materials expanded in 2014, with blister packs (see-through plastic packaging from such things as electronics and toys) being added in February, more types of acceptable plastic film (outer wrap) in April, and paper coffee cups in October.
- **In September 2016**, we held the BIG blue box event in which we distributed over 12,000 89 litre (23.5 gallon) blue boxes. This event launched the two-box sort, and use of larger blue boxes for all Containers (cans, cartons, bottles and cartons).
- **In March 2017**, a new standard curbside collection service level launched in March, 2017 to provide the same level of service to all eligible households. The curbside program changes included switching blue box collection in the rural areas in the four Townships from every-other-week collection to weekly collection. With this and other changes (such as every other week garbage collection), blue box tonnage increased eight per cent in the first year of the changes.

2020's

- **In 2020**, new provincial legislative changes were announced for a Circular Economy. A new approach to the Ontario Blue Box program will be launched over several years that will make producers responsible for managing the packaging they produce.

Generations of the blue box



2016 two-box sort



Nyle Ludolph, Father of the Blue Box

