

Innovative glass works: Plan statements and facts

The Innovative Glass Works plan, which was met with significant media attention, raised a number of questions and public criticisms.

Here are the main statements that were made and factual responses.

Statement

“Under the Innovative Glass Works plan, glass containers will not be recycled into new glass containers.”

Facts

There is only one glass container manufacturer in Québec, and it does not produce green glass containers such as the one used for most wine bottles. For ÉEQ, it is critical that we have the capacity to provide this recycler with raw material as we diversify the glass markets. This is why ÉEQ believes all sorting centres in proximity to urban centres should be able to produce glass of large cullet sizes, which can then be sorted by colour by a conditioner and reused as a raw material for bottle remelting.

Indeed, in fall 2019, ÉEQ will make an equipment donation to Montréal’s new sorting centre to provide it with the capacity to produce glass of large cullet sizes. To successfully manufacture new containers, the conditioner will have to install leading-edge optical sorting processes. It will then be possible to make new glass containers from glass collected through curbside recycling, as the American experience in Pennsylvania has shown.

Statement

“Glass must be recycled into glass to be considered part of a circular economy. To have greater environmental value, glass must be used to make new glass instead of being recycled into other types of products. This is the best form of recycling.”

Facts

We have known for a long time that we must innovate to find outlets for the different products we recycle. For example, producing piping from detergent containers or toilet paper from recycled paper are not only excellent ideas but also concrete examples of circular economy. Glass that becomes a recyclable product is a form of circular economy that just has a longer loop. Similarly, creating products that avoid the use of virgin materials also constitutes an excellent solution.

The circular economy is a concept that is still being debated, and that is perfectly normal. As for us, we believe that the circular economy calls for innovation. By confining ourselves to a narrow definition in which each product must

be transformed into the same product again, we become dependent on the market and close ourselves off to all innovation.

Statement

“Fifty million dollars is too much to resolve the glass recycling issue. We can do better at a lower cost.”

Facts

The issue of glass recycling has unleashed a debate and taken on symbolic value in regard to recycling in Québec. It is therefore critical to resolve the issue once and for all and focus our energy on other equally important issues.

Broadly speaking, it is absolutely necessary to invest in quality sorting in Québec. The development of value-added markets demonstrates that these investments pay off. And profitability is easily measured against the material’s selling price.

Only half of the \$50M is to be spent purchasing equipment for sorting centres. The other half is allocated to market development, which is necessary regardless of the collection method (curbside or deposit) in order to avoid depending on a single buyer.

To compare the extent of these investments with those required to implement a glass container deposit system, the proponents of the deposit system should disclose their financial projections. No one seriously believes that implementing a new deposit system, including collection points, truck transport and labour, will not cost a cent. Available estimates reveal that the amounts are much higher than those required under the Innovative Glass Works plan.

Statement

“During the pilot project, three of the five sorting centres stopped using the equipment.”

Facts

This is false. None of the sorting centres stopped the pilot project, and we have the weight bills to prove it. All the sorting centres agreed to continue the pilot project until June 2019 and will keep the equipment they received. The main disruptions were caused by maintenance, parts replacement and calibration issues, which are commonplace in pilot projects and properly managed manufacturing companies.

Statement

“The equipment installed under the Innovative Glass Works plan is not efficient in winter.”

Facts

Tests revealed that the days following snowstorms strongly affect the sorting centres’ overall performances. This holds true for glass processing, as well as the processing of every other material. The aftermaths of snowstorms are challenging because a significant amount of snow enters the sorting centres—an issue that actually relates more to collection and citizen awareness (for example, citizens leave lids of their recycling bins open) rather than the sorting process itself. The Innovative Glass Works plan sets out means to adapt collection and reduce the negative impacts—two conditions for successful sorting.

Statement

“The equipment installed under the Innovative Glass Works plan does not sort the glass by colour.”

Facts

This is true. Sorting on the basis of colour requires optical sorters, and no sorting centre has the critical mass required to acquire these sorters, which are always installed in conditioning facilities. Like the glass collected through the deposit system, glass collected through curbside recycling must first be processed by a conditioner to remove the infusible materials, metal collars and caps and then sorted by colour before it is sent to a recycler to make new containers. The process is clearly outlined in the Innovative Glass Works plan.

Statement

“By advocating for a deposit system, the director of Montréal’s largest sorting centre rejected the Innovative Glass Works plan and the quality of its equipment.”

Facts

This is false. While he did recall his organization’s traditional position in favour of a deposit system, he did not make any negative comments on the quality of the Innovative Glass Works plan or its equipment.

ÉEQ publicly announced that it would donate new glass processing equipment to the city of Montréal in order to pursue the aim of remelting glass to produce new containers. This equipment will be installed in close collaboration with the city and the director of the sorting centre.

Statement

“The only objective of the Innovative Glass Works plan is to dismiss the deposit system.”

Facts

ÉEQ’s mission is to finance and optimize the curbside recycling system. Voluntarily financed by the companies that pay for recovery, the Innovative Glass Works plan is a practical means to prove that it is entirely possible to recycle 100% of the glass collected through curbside recycling in Québec and diversify the glass markets, including the remelting market.

ÉEQ is of the opinion that the solution is far simpler and more cost-effective to implement than the development of a parallel deposit system that will make life more difficult for citizens and not yield any additional environmental benefits.

Statement

“The technologies installed under the Innovative Glass Works plan are inadequate and deprive us of a bigger market: the remelting market.”

Facts

On the contrary, the efforts aim the remelting market, as well as other markets, including those with high added value. ÉEQ does not believe in repeating the mistakes of the past by remaining dependent on a single company, as it was the case in the 2013 glass recycling crisis.

However, under the Innovative Glass Works plan, the sorting centres located near urban centres must install equipment to produce glass of large cullet sizes, as required by conditioners, whose mission will be to remove the infusible materials and sort the glass by colour. The objective is to ensure that the glass can then be used as a raw material for remelting.

It is important to note that the only company that manufactures glass containers in Québec is located in the Montréal area. However, it does not produce green glass containers, and this limits its supply since green glass is omnipresent in the glass collected through curbside recycling (largely wine bottles). It is therefore critical to find other markets for green glass.

Statement

“ÉEQ affirms that all recyclers can use the glass, but this is actually not the case.”

Facts

This is false. If the proposals of the Innovative Glass Works plan are adopted and implemented, all recyclers will be able to use the glass, including recyclers involved in remelting.

Statement

“The purity level of the glass was artificially increased by including infusible materials (ceramic, stone, etc.).”

Facts

This is false. For the vast majority of glass recycling markets, these materials are found in small quantities in glass without being considered impurities. However, to remelt the glass, the materials must be removed by the conditioner. This process is accounted for in the Innovative Glass Works plan. The purity level is a general indicator, not one meant to meet the needs of only one organization.

Statement

“The Innovative Glass Works plan forces us to send the glass to a conditioner before it is recycled. The deposit system does not.”

Facts

This statement is entirely false.

The deposit system includes glass containers that are not refilled, only brown beer bottles are. The other colours must be processed by a conditioner to remove the labels, metal collars and other impurities. It is only afterwards that the glass is sold on different markets, including mineral wool manufacturing and remelting. In both the curbside collection and deposit systems, the glass must be conditioned before it is remelted. The same applies to the brown beer bottles that reach the end of the reuse process: they are crushed and sent to a conditioner.