

Group says too many litter bugs in Estrie

By Brion Robinson
SHERBROOKE

Co-ordinator of Action Saint-François Robert-Léo Gendron said Wednesday that clean-up volunteers are finding more garbage than ever in Saint-François River basins. Gendron made the announcement Wednesday morning in Sherbrooke.

"People are consuming more than ever," Gendron emphasized. "Every year we're finding more garbage. A lot more."

This year, the environmental organization gathered around 16 metric tons of scrap. About 75 per cent of that amount was recycled.

In all, about 230 volunteers dressed in green rubber boots and wearing work gloves came out to haul away scrap metal and rusty cans. From May 15 to Nov. 13, 2004, Action Saint-François organized 28 clean ups on seven drainage basins of the Saint-François.

Clean-ups took place in Austin, Compton, North Hatley, Richmond, Ste-Catherine-de-Hatley, Sherbrooke and Stoke. Action Saint-François is a non-profit environmental organization that has been organizing these voluntary clean-ups around the Estrie region for the past 12 years.

Although this amount isn't as high as totals in the past, Gendron said people shouldn't rely on numbers to determine the amount of garbage that was picked up.

"Small numbers just show that we're picking up smaller pieces of garbage," he said, adding that some years they find more scrap cars than others and that this can make it seem like they're finding more trash.



PERRY BEATON/SPECIAL

According to Action Saint-François co-ordinator Robert-Léo Gendron, people in the Estrie region are consuming more than ever.

Gendron explained the clean ups are necessary because even a small piece of garbage like an old shoe can be deadly.

"Chemicals in the leather can leak into rivers or streams nearby," he said. "Heat can even transform chemicals in the rubber and this makes it more toxic. This kills fish and harms wildlife."

This is the first year volunteers helped drag up trash from the bottom of rivers. Divers from the Nord Sud diving school helped to haul up pieces of a sawed up Mercedes from the murky bottom of the Magog River in August.

Gendron helped the divers haul up

one of the car's doors into an aluminum boat the organization had borrowed.

"The car must have been around 20 or 30 years old," he said while watching a video of the divers. "The metal was in great condition."

Gendron added that most of the car had to be left at the bottom of the river because it was too heavy to lift.

In the woods near Richmond, clean up crews even found some "valuable" trash. Around 60 old

green pop bottles were scattered around the bushes.

"Someone said they could be sold for about \$20 to \$25 on EBay," Gendron said.

Although the program has been surviving on profits from selling the scrap metal it finds and a \$25,000 annual grant from Environment Canada, Gendron said the organization is just scraping by.

"This organization could disappear without more funding," he said, noting that this money must cover gas expenses, clean up materials and wages for him and his assistant.

"Officially, I put in about 35 hours a week," he said, noting that he always puts in a few hours extra. "There's still lots of work to be done."

Sherbrooke Member of Parliament Serge Cardin said he helped clean up areas with other volunteers a couple of years ago and that he couldn't believe the amount of garbage that didn't get to the dump.

"When people see how much trash is out there they really appreciate clean-up efforts like this one," he said.

Cardin added that environmental protection is getting more and more attention from the government.

"A clean environment contributes to a healthy society," he said, adding that the government is willing to work with environmental organizations to evaluate their needs.

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