

Ontario construction industry calls for recycled materials mandate

By [ReNew Canada](#) - January 15, 2025

A coalition of Ontario civil infrastructure leaders, builders, suppliers, and engineers has launched a campaign to urge government leaders to adopt policy changes to increase sustainability in the construction of public infrastructure projects.

A government mandate to include just 20 per cent of recycled crushed aggregates (RCA) for critical construction projects like roads, subdivisions, highways, bridges, and tunnels can save local governments more than \$260 million, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to removing 15 million cars from the road annually.

“Recycled aggregates are cost-effective, sustainable, and high-performing and can help municipalities deliver more from their capital plans while helping to reach their net-zero targets,” said Raly Chakarova, executive director of the Toronto and Area Road Builders Association (TARBA). “Using more recycled materials in construction projects can preserve non-renewable resources, reduce waste and traffic congestion, and contribute to long-term sustainability.”

[RCA](#) is made from reclaimed concrete and asphalt that would otherwise end up in landfills. By adding it to upcoming infrastructure projects, RCA offers significant economic advantages for municipalities struggling to address a growing state of good repair backlog and the infrastructure investments needed to keep up with population growth.

Provincial standards and extensive testing have shown RCA to be as high-performing as primary aggregate, and RCA already has a proven track record in Ontario, including in our 400-series highways, Pearson International Airport, house-enabling infrastructure in subdivisions, and Greater Toronto Area transit projects.

Across the world, governments are incentivizing the use of RCA through policies and regulations that accelerate the shift toward sustainable construction materials. A coalition of nine industry organizations — Concrete Ontario, Good Roads, the Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (GTSWCA), Heavy Civil Association of Toronto (HCAAT), Ontario Road Builders Association (ORBA), Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO), Ontario Sand, Stone, and Gravel Association (OSSGA), Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), and Toronto and Area Road Builders Association (TARBA) — is advocating for municipal and provincial decision-makers to take the lead here in Ontario and maximize RCA’s economic and environmental benefits.

At the municipal level:

- Include the use of RCA in tenders for construction projects.
- Mandate a minimum amount of RCA for all public infrastructure projects.
- Harmonize municipal specifications for RCA through provincial standards.

At the provincial level:

- Incentivize the use of RCA through funding for municipal infrastructure projects.
- Prohibit municipalities from specifying “primary-only” in public infrastructure tenders.
- Harmonize municipal specifications for RCA through provincial standards.
- Mandate a minimum 20 percent RCA of aggregates used on all municipal, regional, and provincial public infrastructure projects.

“The use of RCA can significantly contribute to the carbon reduction of new concrete used to build our homes, roadways, bridges, and other critical building infrastructure. The use of RCA in producing unshrinkable Fill (U-Fill) and concrete mud slabs has contributed significantly to environmental sustainability over the past decade. With the update of the CSA A23.1/.2 Concrete standard at the end of 2024, the concrete industry can now utilize up to 30 per cent RCA as a replacement for virgin coarse aggregates in an extensive amount of concrete applications,” said Bart Kanters, president, Concrete Ontario.

“The time has come to embrace the use of recycled content in the construction and rehabilitation of our road networks. Doing so will abate the need for unnecessary resource extraction without compromising performance,” said Scott Butler, Executive Director, Good Roads.

“By incorporating recycled crushed aggregates into municipal infrastructure projects, we are not only reducing construction waste and conserving natural resources but also saving taxpayer dollars. It’s a sustainable approach to building roads and transitways that reduces construction-related greenhouse gas emissions and truck-related congestion on our roads. The benefits are simply too good to ignore,” said Patrick McManus, executive director, Greater Toronto Sewer and Watermain Contractors Association (GTSWCA).

“The use of RCA in Ontario and worldwide is a testament to its many benefits, including promoting sustainability, preserving non-renewable resources, and reducing traffic congestion. We urge all Ontario municipalities to mandate a minimum amount of RCA for infrastructure projects and see for themselves the meaningful and measurable benefits of this practice,” said Peter Smith, executive director, Heavy Civil Association of Toronto (HCAT).

“Increasing the use of RCA is a great and tangible way for the construction industry to improve sustainability and help the environment. RCCAO is proud to partner on this important campaign highlighting RCA’s environmental and economic benefits. The Ministry of Transportation’s leadership in adopting recycled crushed aggregates demonstrates their commitment to innovation and environmental stewardship, and we urge municipalities across Ontario to follow their example. Together, we can build durable, high-performing infrastructure that supports our communities and the environment,” said Nadia Todorova, executive director, Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

“ORBA strongly supports the use of RCA as it aligns with our commitment to sustainable and efficient infrastructure development. By incorporating RCA, we reduce construction waste, conserve natural resources, and lower environmental impacts — all while maintaining the high standards of quality and durability that Ontario’s roadways demand. It’s a practical and forward-thinking approach to building a greener, more sustainable future for our province,” said Steven Crombie, Senior Director of Public Affairs, Ontario Road Builders Association (ORBA).

“Ontario will require more than 4 billion tonnes of stone, sand, and gravel to meet its ambitious infrastructure vision over the next 20 years, according to a Supply Demand study commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Recycled aggregate can play an important role in meeting that supply. Properly processed, recycled aggregate that meets Ontario Provincial Standard Specifications (OPSS) is a perfect material for road construction, engineered backfill, and base material in many other applications,” said Michael McSweeney, Executive Director, Ontario Stone, Sand and Gravel Association (OSSGA).

“Advances in material science and recycling technologies have demonstrated that RCA performs comparably to traditional alternatives in many applications. Most significantly, the use of RCA reduces the demand for valuable finite natural resources, such as sand, gravel, and crushed stone. The use of RCA in engineering designs will dramatically reduce the amount of waste going to landfill while decreasing road congestion and the associated carbon emissions, both favourable outcomes for sustainable development. The OSPE is a proud coalition member and is happy to endorse using RCA in construction to build Ontario’s future,” said Sandro Perruzza, CEO, Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE).