

# And now for something completely different:

# HEEBONICS

## Filmmaker documents family's garbage disaster

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Special to The CJN

Foul odour and fruit flies can result from forgetting to take out the garbage on garbage day.

But what happens when a family of five misses the garbage truck for three months?

*Garbage! The Revolution Starts at Home* simulates exactly this disaster. The new documentary, produced and directed by Toronto-native Andrew Nisker, exposes the dirty side of garbage, both at home and at the dumpster.

The film documents the McDonalds, an ordinary family that is asked to keep all their garbage for three months. It then follows them on a journey to find out where the garbage goes and what it's doing to the world after it leaves their home.

"It's about the pollution a typical household creates," Nisker says. "And it isn't just garbage - it's where waste water goes, and what happens outside their home to get their coal power energy. We even looked at some of the things [that accumulate] over the holidays, just by celebrating."

Nisker hopes the film will raise environmental consciousness.

"I want to make people more aware of pollution activities that are basically invisible to us because of the way the system is set up," he says. "The garbageman takes everything away, so it's easy to miss what we're really doing."

For Nisker, poor air quality has been both a global and personal problem.

"I grew up asthmatic in Toronto, and even as a kid, I had to pay every day just to breathe. It makes you think about why you're doing that. We drive cars that emit so much pollution, yet the technology is barely evolving. Why do we just accept the poor air quality?"

Andrew developed the idea for the film in 2002 at the peak of the Toronto garbage strike. The strike, which lasted two weeks, covered the entire city in mounds of rotting waste. "They were piling up garbage by the park near my home. I looked at what we were doing to that park, and I wanted to capture that feeling in a film," Nisker says.

Though this was his first feature-length documentary, Nisker is not new to the entertainment industry. A graduate of York University, he has produced a myriad of interactive entertainment products, including interactive DVD board games and children's programming.

The title of Nisker's new film pays tribute to



Filmmaker Andrew Nisker exposes the dirty side of garbage both at home and at the dumpster.

[Photo: courtesy of Bernice Kim]

Nisker's late friend Robert Hunter, the co-founder of Greenpeace, who came up with the expression "the revolution does start at home."

Nisker says, "If you can't clean up your own home, it'll be hard to expect the rest of the world to do anything. It has to begin at home, with individuals and families."

The film has seen major commercial success, with screenings in more than 120 communities worldwide. Nisker is distributing the film himself. It has primarily been viewed at large "screening parties" from Toronto to Torino, Italy. The film has also been selected to screen at Toronto's Hot Docs International Film Festival next

spring and has been shown at more than 120 schools worldwide.

"The Jewish community, of course, has been very supportive of the project," Nisker says. The Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre hosted a special screening last April, and the film has also received rave reviews in Israel. Nisker is currently negotiating a broadcasting deal with an Israeli network.

"The reactions from everyone have been fantastic," Nisker notes. "The highest compliment we get is when people spread the revolution alongside the film."

Since the film's debut, several groups have emulated the McDonald project and done their own garbage audits.

"People start talking, because everybody lives in a home, and everybody creates garbage. It's a universal thing we can all do better."

According to Nisker, there are "1001 ways" each household can reduce. He suggests primarily a much more critical eye when shopping, and encourages viewers to reconsider their product packaging.

The McDonald family have started to do their part by using fewer harsh chemical cleaners and using tap water instead of bottled water.

The garbage-revolution movement also identifies ways to make the holiday seasons more environmentally friendly.

At Chanukah, Nisker suggests sending e-cards, instead of paper ones; giving gifts in reusable bags; and using china cups instead of disposables.

"Disposable flatware is a major problem," Nisker says. "It's convenient, but it's very harmful. I think all of us can re-think our

holiday traditions and make them a little greener."

The documentary itself is only one part of the growing international garbage movement.

The film's website, [www.garbagerevolution.com](http://www.garbagerevolution.com), has spawned an online community of more than 5,000 members devoted to waste reduction.

"It's kind of like an eco-YouTube," Nisker jokes.

The site offers members more information about the issues in the film, monthly newsletters and extra footage from the movie. Members can also contribute to *Garbage2!*, a new film composed of user-submitted ideas about how to reduce garbage in different communities. [Garbagerevolution.com](http://Garbagerevolution.com) will soon also host an online store of eco-friendly products.

Despite the serious message behind the film, Nisker stresses that it is largely intended to be entertaining.

"It's important to present issues in a way that people will pay attention to. There are many great environmental films out there, that aren't necessarily doing that well commercially. If you don't do that, you don't get your message across."

For Nisker, the eyes of the McDonald family kept the story fun and relatable.

"Surviving while keeping all your garbage can be very entertaining," he says.

Currently, Nisker is working on his second feature film, *Chemical Nation*. The film's subject is household cleaning chemicals and how they impact the environment and people's health. It is expected to be released in late 2009.



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