

Insights and a Plea from a Food Bank Volunteer



Vancouver, B.C. – In an effort to be charitable, sometimes people donate items to food banks that inadvertently cost these non-profits precious time and money. David Eng volunteers at the Greater Vancouver Food Bank. During each three-hour shift, he discards, composts and recycles many kilograms of unusable food and packaging. He typically volunteers at the food bank’s warehouse in Strathcona, which is a few blocks away from where he grew up. It is one of the lowest income neighbourhoods in Canada, so David knows how important it is to help food banks maximize their ability to serve people in need.

“My volunteer role is sorting out food that has been deposited in collection bins around the city. I see a lot of avoidable waste. For example, if someone opens a tin of cookies that contains two cellophane packages and they decide they don’t like the cookies, they might donate the entire tin. When it arrives at the food bank, only the sealed package can be used. We have to dispose of the open one. It takes time and resources for the food bank to sort, compost and recycle.”

Not all open items are as innocuous as cookies. “The worst thing is when someone ‘donates’ a half eaten take-out meal in a plastic bag. It might sit in a bin for a month before reaching the warehouse. When it arrives, I don’t know what is inside until I untie the bag. It is very unpleasant and this has happened quite often.”

As a REALTOR®, David knows that when people sell their homes, they often clean up their pantries by donating to the food bank. Sometimes they have friends, family and others helping them out. “Please take a moment to check the expiry date. If it is more than a year past the best before date, we have to throw it away.”

“I also learned that junk food is not really considered food! The food bank aims to provide nutritious items, so we have to get rid of pop, potato chips, etc.” He has found there is always a need for pasta, sauces and canned meat, fish and soup.

Food banks particularly appreciate cash donations, since they can use the money to purchase exactly what they require, often at discount. David notes that it is easy to donate at grocery stores such as Safeway. Cashiers simply scan a bar code.

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