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Smart move, North Carolina

Steve Alexander

When North Carolina rolled out its recent plastic bottle disposal ban, industry and business leaders noticed. To some, a landfill ban might sound simply like an effort to save landfill space. But to businesses it is much more than that.

Banning plastic bottles from disposal is North Carolina's voice of support. Support for recycling and smart resource use. Support for green jobs, local companies and the Southeast's strong manufacturing base. Support for regionally created feedstock – home grown material that will go into the production of new products. North Carolina is standing up for good jobs in and for the United States. Good jobs that can effectively compete against outsourcing pressure.

Smart move, North Carolina.

This state's many plastic recycling and manufacturing facilities directly employ nearly 40,000 people. Add in support businesses such as human resources services and transportation companies, and that number grows. With initiatives such as this landfill ban, North Carolina is showing commitment to keeping and creating jobs right here.

North Carolina is centrally located in one of the strongest recycled plastic-based manufacturing areas in the country. Locally this state supports recycling and reprocessing companies like Clear Path, currently under construction in Fayetteville; Custom Polymers in Charlotte and Durham; and Envision Plastics, the country's second largest HDPE recycling company, in Reidsville. These facilities are scrambling for bottles to recycle. When they can feed reprocessing and manufacturing demand with locally produced material, shipping costs go down, revenue goes up, jobs stay intact. By not throwing away plastic bottles, North Carolinians support efficiency, business growth, and inexpensive feedstock for North Carolina manufacturers.

In states nearby we see even more demand for recyclable plastics. In Georgia, Shaw and Mohawk need increasing amounts of material for their carpet and flooring mills. In South Carolina, the world's largest PET soda bottle reprocessing plant, NURRC, operates in Spartanburg. In Kentucky, Signode produces strapping made from recycled plastic. In just one of the many examples of recycled and reprocessed material coming back home again, some of Signode's strapping returns to North Carolina to wrap products such as locally made brick.

North Carolina has wisely secured its place in a regional network for domestically produced goods because this state both needs and supplies recycled material. The capacity is here. The bottles are here. We need to get the bottles out of the line for the landfill and into the line for recycling. Then we can clearly see the direct benefit to this state and the region.

Recycling has been around for a long time. Sure it's a good way to conserve energy and natural resources. But with this disposal ban North Carolina is showing surrounding states the bigger picture. Recycling in North Carolina is about supporting local business, local jobs, and local networks for industry. Those connections are true and strong. Partnerships fuel business that can effectively compete with outsourced jobs.

Again, smart move North Carolina.

Steve Alexander is Executive Director, Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers. The Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers is the national trade association representing companies who acquire, reprocess and sell the output of more than 90 percent of the post-consumer plastic processing capacity in North America. www.plasticsrecycling.org