



Officials say bottle ban will be hard to enforce

After Oct. 1, rigid plastic can no longer be thrown in garbage

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Local officials say they're stumped about how to enforce a new state law designed to encourage recycling by outlawing plastic bottles from traditional waste receptacles.

Beginning Oct. 1, rigid plastic containers such as soda and water bottles, milk jugs, and laundry detergent containers can only be discarded in recycling bins.

Rigid plastics are defined as bottles that have a neck smaller than the body of the container.

The law, introduced in 2005 by House Speaker Joe Hackney, D-Chatham, is designed to stimulate economic opportunities for entrepreneurs, while improving the environment by decreasing energy usage and lowering greenhouse gasses.

But area county officials say it will be difficult to enforce.

Pasquotank County Manager Randy Keaton said the county has had a similar ban in place since 1994.

However, up until now county officials have never strictly enforced it.

"We do not do active enforcement(of the ban on discarding plastic bottles)," Keaton said. "We enforce it through educating the public about the benefits of recycling."

Keaton said no one has ever been cited for violating the county ban. And he's not sure how the county would cite violators after Oct. 1, once the state law goes into effect.

Because Pasquotank does not offer curbside trash pickup, residents must take their trash to one of the county's recycling sites. Those sites, Keaton said, are staffed by county employees who ask patrons to separate recyclable materials from their household garbage.

"I typically put my trash in one bag, glass in another, and non-glass (recyclable) items in another," Keaton said.

Keaton said he wonders how the new statewide ban will handle violators who toss plastic bottles into public trash receptacles.

"When you're out in the public, there's no other place to put (plastic bottles) except trash bins," he said.

Currituck County Manager Dan Scanlon agrees the new law will present challenges on keeping plastic bottles out of waste bins.

Scanlon said the county's waste contractor, Waste Management, will be asked to help the county monitor for violations.

"We will ask them to be aware," he said. "There are many types of material that are not appropriate for disposal, and plastic bottles will be added to that list."

Some of the materials currently banned from waste receptacles at county recycling sites include pesticides, household paint and automobile oil.

Scanlon also hopes the new law encourages citizens to consider the impact not recycling has on the environment.

"The ban itself, I would hope it increases recycling efforts," Scanlon said. "It may encourage people to think about (disposing plastic bottles) more carefully, and those already participating (in recycling efforts) will likely continue."

Camden County officials said the recycling law is an important step forward, but, like Pasquotank and Currituck, they do not have the resources to properly enforce a ban on discarding plastic bottles in waste receptacles.

"We just don't have the resources for something like that," Camden County Manager Randell Woodruff said.

Both Woodruff and Keaton said they have no immediate plans to alter their county's current waste disposal methods to accommodate the new law.

North Carolina is the first state in the Southeast to enact a statewide plastic bottle ban.

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