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Recycling gets serious with threat of fines

By Myron Pitts

Here at the newspaper, we received an e-mail last week that went to all employees.

"We need your help!" the company's executive assistant wrote.

We need to be careful to put our plastic bottles in the recycling containers, she said, adding: "If plastic is found mixed in our trash, WE WILL BE FINED!"

Folks who work at the county's other large companies may have received similar warnings, because of a state law that took effect Thursday banning plastic bottles from landfills.

A notice our company received from Cumberland County's recycling coordinator said if plastic is found with our regular garbage, there will be a special handling fee of \$100, on top of the regular \$30 fee per ton.

Some say the state law does not have teeth, but that sounds like teeth to me. In a tight economy, no employer is looking to throw away money.

And I have been around offices long enough to know that e-mails such as the one we received have an effect. You won't need "plastic-bottle police," either.

Take me. Now, I wish I could tell you I had a perfect record of always putting my bottles in blue containers. I don't.

However, if I ever think about throwing out a bottle again, I'll check myself: Do I want my one Dasani bottle to be the one that gets the company fined? Human nature, as well as common sense, is to avoid needlessly annoying the person who writes your checks.

Recycling programs succeed or fail in proportion to how much they account for what people do, not what they do.

"The easier, the better" is the basic formula. Anything that requires folks to carry plastics anywhere but to their primary, daily trash receptacle will fall short.

Our county is near the bottom of the state in recycling plastic because we ignore this rule.

Only Fayetteville has curbside recycling for homes, and this was added just last year (and is not included in the state figures). Hope Mills and Spring Lake, the next two towns in size, do not offer recycling, nor do the other municipalities.

The city and county offer a few places where people can drag recyclables, but to return to the point above - most people are not going to bother. Call it lazy or what have you. But it's how people are, and they're not going to change.

The city took a big step with the move to recycling and should be applauded. City residents responded by recycling like nobody's business. So much garbage was diverted from the landfill, the city will be able to drop the \$42 per year recycling fee for residents by \$5.

But the program continues to have a huge hole: The large number of people who live in apartments here have no convenient way to recycle. In February, the City Council identified expanding recycling to apartments as a priority.

I wonder what would stop the city from requiring apartment-complex owners to offer on-site recycling?

Local leaders will need such creative solutions to finish an important job we've only just started.

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Paul

I live in the county. Can anyone tell me what I am supposed to do other than buying a pick up and taking all the plastic to the appropriate place. (Well, maybe I am exaggerating a bit!), but I haven't heard of anyone getting notice of segregated garbage in the county for pick up. Until then, the county residents will still probably keep putting plastic in their trash. What to do?

I guess I'll just have to petition Tony Chavone and his Council to annex everyone in the state!

10/4/2009 5:25:09 PM

Bobby Bell

If the city is serious about recycling why don't they give us large recycleable containers. I have more recycle waste than garage so I end up putting recycleable in the trash.
Bobby

10/4/2009 8:11:36 PM
