

BY LYNN BONNER - STAFF WRITER  
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## State to residents: recycle, pretty please

Public service announcements, fliers, and in Raleigh's case, corporate-sponsored gift cards, are all aimed at getting North Carolina households to do their part in complying with a state law kicking in Oct. 1 that bans plastic bottles from landfills.

But don't look for the trash cops to come knocking if soda bottles end up in your garbage cans.

"That's not the spirit of the law," said Scott Mouw, the state's recycling director. "Clearly, this is more of a law of spirit or intent, everyone recognizing the positive reasons to recycle."

Any state enforcement efforts will be aimed at haulers who show up at landfills with big loads of banned material. Most local governments don't have the power or the interest in dogging residents who don't recycle.

"We don't have the resources to police individuals" by going through their garbage bags, said Tim Broome, Johnston County's director of public utilities.

Without such enforcement efforts, though, North Carolina's embrace of recycling has been more of a half-hug. North Carolina missed a 10-year recycling goal it set back in 1991 for reducing trash disposal across the state. In fact, people ended up sending more trash to landfills rather than less. Garbage disposal went from 1.01 tons per person in 1992 to 1.21 tons per person by June 2001.

The state has a new goal, to recycle 2 million tons of bottles, cans and other materials each year by 2012. The rate now is about 1.3 million tons a year.

The state recycles fewer than one in five bottles, Mouw said, and he's sure that rate can go up.

One of the state's new tactics to convince people to keep plastic out of the trash is to focus on the empty bottles as a raw material for the state recycling industry. The state has plants that are a step in the manufacturing chain that turns used bottles into new bottles and other materials. The largest plastics recycling plant in the nation is to open in Fayetteville next year.

Though state law bars specific materials from landfills, such as aluminum cans, big appliances and tires, recycling practices vary across the state and are largely governed by local ordinance. Some communities, such as Orange County and Cary, constantly add items to their list of recyclables, while other localities make a more limited effort.

### **Not just bottles**

Though the local education efforts are focused mostly on bottles, Cary is telling residents it will also pick up used oil filters from the curb. They are included in the new ban but not often found in household trash.

Orange County recycled more plastic per person than any other last year, according to state figures. Orange residents recycled about 29.5 pounds of plastic bottles per person in 2007-08. Pamlico County was next with 14.8 pounds per person. The state average was 3.8 pounds per person.

"People across the county have a really high recycling ethic," said Blair Pollock, Orange County's solid waste planner.

Four counties didn't collect plastic for recycling. Some of the state's towns, Kannapolis being the largest, don't have curbside recycling, Mouw said.

Katie Burdett, who wrote about plastics recycling as a requirement for her master's in public administration from UNC-Chapel Hill this year, said the state would need to require recycling and develop an enforcement strategy to maximize the ban's impact.

Local communities' recycling success largely depends on the commitment of those in charge of running it, said Burdett, who interned in the state recycling office. Communities that have someone whose sole job it is to encourage recycling, keep in touch with major garbage producers and watch the recycling markets do best, she said.

"Some of the people I talked to do that don't have a dedicated program staff, those programs aren't performing so well," she said.

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