

Trash ban law has mixed impact

*by Jacqueline Hough
The Daily Herald Staff Writer*

ROANOKE RAPIDS — A new law banning some recyclable materials from being dumped in landfills goes into effect today but its enforcement will vary from place to place.

In Northampton County, residents can request recycling bins along with their trash bin. In Halifax County, there is no recycling program for residents. They are encouraged to take their recyclables to convenience centers for disposal. No enforcement mechanism is in place for the new law.

The law bans plastic bottles, oil filters and wood pallets from disposal in state landfills. This means plastic bottles, with a base wider than its neck, such as drink, shampoo, soap, cough syrup and dressing and condiment bottles.

Plastic tubs like margarine and yogurt containers along with bottles containing pesticides or motor oil are excluded.

Melvin Stokes, solid waste director for Northampton County, said there is only a transfer station in Jackson. At the site, only wood, shingles and sheet rock are accepted. He said the ban doesn't affect them because they don't accept plastic bottles, wooden pallets and motor oil filters.

Waste Industries picks up household waste and recyclables. The recyclables are picked up every two weeks. "We are encouraging people to recycle more," he said.

Billy Martin, public works director for Northampton County, said they are staying in compliance and people are encouraged to recycle.

Martin thinks the law is good. "If you put a plastic bottle in a landfill, it stays forever," he said. Public Works has a full service auto repair shop with a Sanford company picking up the motor oil and filters. Any pallets are taken to a company in Roanoke Rapids.

He added it is a win-win situation for everyone by recycling. For residents who want to recycle, the county provides recycling bins and will deliver them to households. "We do whatever we can to help people," Martin said. "Just call 534-6341."

In Halifax County, recyclables are not picked up from individual households. Residents can take recyclable items to one of seven solid waste convenience centers throughout the county.

Gwen Matthews, acting public works utilities director for Halifax County, said picking up household recyclables is something the county will look at in the future. The upcoming landfill ban is costly but necessary, she said.

"We have to protect our environment," Matthews said. "It is something we will have to do in the future. They are taking the measures now."

In North Carolina, only one out of every five plastic bottles generated is recycled. According to Chris Frazier, public information officer with the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, if all the plastic bottles used in the state were recycled, more than 2.4 billion additional

plastic bottles would be kept out of landfills each year.

She added their goal is to get all plastic bottles recycled. "I don't know if that is realistic but we want all of it recycled," she said.

Frazier hopes the disposal ban will reinforce the office's "2 Million Tons by 2012" goal that was announced in 2008. The goal is to challenge local governments to improve the performance of their recycling programs to achieve an annual recovery rate of two million tons of recycling.

Northampton County ranked 79 in the state's 100 counties in the rate of per capita plastic bottle recovery while Halifax County ranked 95th, according to the North Carolina Solid Waste Annual Report.

Orange County has top spot with a recovery rate of more than 29 pounds of plastic bottles per person.