

PLASTIC BOTTLES ARE NOT

TRASH

By Leslie Johnson

On Oct. 1, North Carolina will become the first state in the Southeast to ban plastic bottles from landfills.

Beginning in October, you are not supposed to discard rigid plastic containers, such as soda bottles, milk jugs and laundry detergent bottles, in regular trash bins with other non-recyclable items. The same plastic containers will also be banned from landfills. This law specifically targets plastic bottles that have necks smaller than the body of the container and a screw top, snap cap or other type of closure.

A similar law took effect last year, banning aluminum cans from landfills in North Carolina.

The legislation was introduced during the 2005 legislative session of the North Carolina General Assembly by state Rep. Joe Hackney (D-Chatham County), who is now the House speaker. The bill was designed to reduce energy consumption and lower greenhouse gas emissions, as well as to save landfill space and reduce litter. Massachusetts and Wisconsin have already both imposed similar bans.

According to the N.C. Division of Waste Management and the N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance (DPPEA), North Carolinians throw away more than \$41.4 million in plastic each year.

Although the state does not have the capacity to monitor your trashcans to make sure you are following the new law, solid waste inspectors will enforce the law during landfill inspections. If the inspectors see mass quantities of the banned materials at landfills or transfer stations, they will put the landfill under a notice of violation and possibly fine them. The idea is to encourage landfill workers to remind people of the law and inform them of appropriate recycling procedures.

Organizations will have two options for disposing of the plastic bottles. They can contract with a service to provide and pick up recycling containers. Or, if organizations prefer

to handle the recycling themselves, they can take the items to a drop-off facility. Organizations that need help finding service providers or a local drop-off facility can contact the DPPEA at (800) 763-0136.

According to Scott Mouw, environmental supervisor for the N.C. Department of the Environment and Natural Resources, there are several benefits to the new law. Recycling reduces solid waste output and saves energy and resources. Mouw says that here in North Carolina, the law will also have positive effects on the state's economy. The demand for plastic has exploded in our state as recycling companies have formed here. Envision Plastics, located in

Reidsville, is the second largest recycler of HDPE plastics in the country. HDPE plastics, also known as #2 plastics, include items like laundry detergent bottles and milk jugs. Envision Plastics employs about 100 people in our state. PETE

plastics, or #1 plastics, are recycled by Coca Cola at a large facility in Spartanburg, S.C., where they process the plastic. The plastic is then sent back to North Carolina, where new bottles are made—and jobs are retained. PETE plastics include soda bottles, cooking oil bottles and peanut butter jars. Clear Path Recycling, another recycling giant, is in the process of bringing new jobs here by building a plant in Fayetteville where plastic will be recycled and converted into polyester. The polyester made at Clear Path Recycling will then be sold primarily to a Kernersville-based carpet company, Shaw Floors. ①

Leslie Johnson is a communications intern with the North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives.

On Oct. 1, North Carolina will ban plastic bottles from landfills. Recycling them has become a big industry in the state.

For more information:

www.p2pays.org/BannedMaterials/PlasticBottles