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Plastic bottles a no-go in landfill Oct. 1

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By **Steve Huffman**

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A statewide ban on the acceptance of plastic bottles, oil filters and wooden pallets at county landfills takes effect Thursday.

At present, North Carolina recovers less than 20 percent of plastic bottles generated in the state, a figure recycling leaders hope to see improved dramatically as a result of the ban.

"The spirit of the ban is to make people make a better effort at recycling," said Scott Mouw, North Carolina's director of recycling. "We're hoping this will make them think before they throw these items in the trash."

It's unlikely that enforcement will take place at individual businesses or other generating facilities. Depending on the type of violator and severity of the violation, the Division of Waste Management may, at its discretion, assess a range of administrative and/or civil penalties for violation of the disposal bans.

Recycling leaders from across the state said the goal of the ban is not to enforce restrictions on individual residents, but to try and make them aware of the importance of recycling.

Mouw said he's been hearing from a wide spectrum of individuals and business leaders concerning the ban.

He said leaders of city and county governments have been asking about ways to strengthen their current recycling programs. Individuals have called to ask how they can help with recycling, Mouw said, and industrial leaders have made similar inquiries.

"It's good to see the interest this ban has generated," he said. "It's been amazing to watch."

Mouw said one of the main reasons behind the ban is to boost the recovery of plastic bottles to meet the demand from plastics processors.

The N.C. Department of Environment & Natural Resources, in support of the ban, notes that a new plastics recycling facility is being built in Fayetteville that will have the capacity to use 280 million pounds of polyethylene (PET) plastic a year.

State officials are educating public and private solid-waste management facilities to separate the banned items from the waste stream before those items arrive at a disposal facility. If necessary, enforcement of the disposal bans will be applied primarily at disposal facilities such as landfills and transfer stations by the N.C. Division of Waste Management.

Mouw said that while the recession greatly affected demand for recycled plastics, the turnaround in the economy has been evident in this area for months. He said China is buying one of every two recycled PET bottles produced in North Carolina for conversion to polyester. The demand for the recycled product is also increasing close to home, Mouw said.

He said a number of North Carolina municipalities — Salisbury, included — have for years had in place strong recycling programs.

"We'd just like to see them work to improve," Mouw said. "We're finding that people want to go green. People want to recycle."

Lynn Hillard, Salisbury's manager of solid waste, said the city has had in effect since 1993 a recycling program that includes plastic bottles. He noted that enforcement of the ban will be done almost exclusively at landfills.

"The main thing they want to see is a recycling program in effect," Hillard said. "The city of Salisbury is doing that."

Not all Rowan County municipalities can say the same. For instance, the recycling program in Spencer was ended years ago as a cost-saving measure. Now, Spencer residents who want to recycle must take their materials to the public works department off Sowers Ferry Road.

Hillard noted that a ban on oil filters has been in effect in Salisbury's trash pick up for years. Oil filters, wooden pallets and plastic bottles are all accepted at the city's recycling facility off Julian Road.

The disposal bans will reinforce DENR's "2 Million Tons by 2012" goal, announced in 2008. 2 Million Tons by 2012 challenges local governments to improve the performance of their recycling programs to achieve an annual recovery rate of 2 million tons of recycling.

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