

Going green: State bans throwing away recyclable plastics

By Pam Haynes
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HIGH POINT - Throwing plastic bottles into the trash will become illegal this fall in North Carolina.

The new law, known as the water bottle ban, was passed in 2005 by the N.C. General Assembly and takes effect Oct. 1.

The ban includes type 1 polyethylene terephthalate plastic, or PET, and type 2 high-density polyethylene plastic, or HDPE. PET materials include water and soda bottles, and HDPE materials include shampoo bottles and milk jugs. Bottles sold in the state contain a code on the bottom identifying its classification.

The law also bans oil filters and wooden pallets from being thrown away.

Scott Mouw, state recycling director, said the law is designed to lessen the burden on landfills and boost the economy.

"I think it's really necessary. It's a great way to create jobs, and it's a great way to reduce our long-term dependency on landfills," he said.

Melanie Bruton, environmental programs coordinator for High Point, said the law won't be aggressively enforced at a residential level.

"In the city of High Point, we do not have a litter police. We're not going to have someone to pick up those people, but these items have been banned from the landfill," Bruton said.

About 170,000 tons of plastics are thrown into state landfills each year, Mouw said. Landfills are not in crisis, he said, but the goal of the law is to reduce the amount of trash accumulating and keep recyclable materials around longer.

"It seems crazy that we would allow this material that could flow through our economy and be used for new materials to be put in a hole in the ground and sit there forever. If we choose to do that, we'll have to use oil and natural gas to make new bottles," he said.

Counties can request waivers from the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources to be exempt from the law if they believe there is no market for the materials in their area, but Mouw said it will be hard to prove.

"The plastics industry has experienced a supply crisis. They can't get enough of this material right now," he said.



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A plastic bottle about to be discarded into a trash barrel.

He cited Envision Plastics in Reidsville, Pallet Resource in Lexington and a future company called Clear Path Recycling coming to Fayetteville as examples of companies in the state that capitalize on recyclable materials and create jobs in the industry.

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