

State bans plastics from
landfills

Written by Beth Fleming

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Law goes into effect Oct. 1

While recycling is no new practice, it's always been a matter of choice. That changed last year when North Carolina state legislators implemented a disposal ban on certain items, including aluminum cans.

Soon, state leaders will take another small step in the ongoing effort to encourage recycling and become a more environmentally friendly state.

On Oct. 1, North Carolina will lead the nation in a disposal ban against plastic bottles, used oil filters and wooden pallets. Effective that day, dumping of such items will no longer be allowed in landfills.

Stephen King, Haywood County Solid Waste Director, said the addition of these items to the list of materials banned from White Oak is another good reason for Haywood County residents to recycle, but it will not mean extensive changes to the way the landfill and the county's 10 convenience centers operate. It will, however, spell a definite change for consumers who currently don't recycle these items.

King has approached the county commissioners about adding a position for environmental sustainability and recycling to help educate the public about the recycling laws and how to best comply with them. The position was part of the budget beginning in January, but because of the new legislation, King is asking for the job to be filled immediately. The commissioners agreed the position could be advertised internally, and will reconsider the request at their next meeting. The increased sale of recyclable materials is projected to offset the position's cost.

"We don't want to strong-arm people," King said. "We want to get their cooperation through education and explaining how we are supporting American jobs by doing that. If you force something, people will be more resistant."

While there are violations for counties with landfills that fail to comply with the state laws regarding the aluminum and plastic ban, King said regulators have indicated a willingness to give people time to adjust.

If the new position is approved, King said, the individual will be charged with education regarding recycling issues, as well as working with the convenience centers and the municipalities to accomplish the "no aluminum, no plastic" goals.

"The towns are constantly wanting more information to help them out," King said. "I believe towns have really taken strides to address recycling as people become more and more aware."

After months of preparing, King said the Materials Recovery Facility is ready for the influx of recyclables that will soon be streaming in.

Now, the focus of the county's sustainability committee has shifted toward education and collection —mainly among businesses, government offices and school functions, like athletic events — making sure that all are equipped with collection bins and set up with a means to haul the items.

A state grant, secured months ago, made it possible for the committee to purchase collection bins, including one bin for each classroom in every county school, totaling 732 rooms. Associate Superintendent of Haywood County Schools, Dr. Bill Nolte, said the school system, despite disposing of perhaps the greatest volume of recyclables of any county entity due to the mere number of people involved, is near ready for collection but continues to work on a plan for hauling the items away.

“We’re glad to have the new law in place and will certainly jump all over it,” he said. “People tend to forget that we’re the largest employer with over 1,200 employees and a student population that changes everyday, ranging from 7,800 to 7,900 students. So, we have a lot of stuff (to recycle). Transporting and moving the stuff is something we will have to develop a plan for, but we will. It’s the right thing to do and we want to be actively involved, making sure we comply with the law, not just because it’s law, but because it’s the right thing to do environmentally and to save landfill space.”

Brandon Rogers, owner of Rogers Express Lube and Tire in Canton, said he also began months ago to prepare for the change.

“We probably go through an average of about 52 used oil filters per day. We’re open six days a week. Now, the people who pick up our recyclable oil pick up our filters, too. They started doing that back in April, in preparation of this change.”

Rogers said he sends recyclable oil and filters to FCC Environmental in Charlotte, one of over 20 different oil filter recycling companies in North Carolina. Steel oil filters are in high demand by steel manufacturers, who recycle the steel as well as residual oil, used to produce fuel oil and re-refined lubricants.

Recycling is a growing industry in America, King said. American companies that recycle items, like plastic, wood, steel and oil are becoming more prevalent, and “are kind of the leading force behind the ban.”

Tracy Hargrove, Haywood County School Maintenance Director, called the law a “win-win situation all the way around.”

“The school saves money (by recycling), because we have to pay for the garbage that we haul off by the ton,” he said. “So the less that goes into the garbage, the less we pay in tipping fees. It helps us from a financial standpoint and from an environmental standpoint. And it helps (King), too, because he makes money by selling commodities: aluminum, plastic, etc. This (ban) is going

to increase the amount of commodities he can sell and will help him out, also. It's a great thing.”

The ban on recyclable items will be enforced by the N.C. Division of Waste Management, primarily at disposal facilities such as landfills and transfer stations. It is unlikely that enforcement will take place at individual businesses or other generating facilities. Depending on the type of violator and the severity of the violation, waste management authorities may, at their discretion, assess a range of administrative and/or civil penalties for violation of the disposal bans. The law does allow for accidental or occasional disposal of small amounts of banned materials.