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County expanding its recycling opportunities

by Meghann Evans

09.09.09 - 09:52 pm



DOBSON — With the state mandating the recycling of plastic bottles, people will have to watch more closely what they throw away. Surry County hopes to make this a little easier for residents.

Presently, residents have to travel to the landfill on Landfill Road off of Old Highway 52 in Mount Airy to drop off their plastics for recycling. The plastic is then stored on a trailer until it is hauled to a materials recycling facility. With the county's new pilot program, recycling opportunities will expand.

The Surry County Board of Commissioners voted at its meeting on Tuesday night to approve a pilot program for plastics recycling at the North Surry Convenience Center. Beginning at some point in October, a container able to hold roughly 1 ton of

plastic will be located at the North Surry recycling location. Commissioner Paul Johnson said the new container for plastics is larger than the trailer at the landfill.

“We’re trying to do it on a larger scale,” Johnson said.

Beginning on Oct. 1, the state is banning the disposal of plastic bottles, oil filters and wooden pallets in landfills. According to the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the state recovers less than one out of every five plastic bottles it generates. The state hopes to boost recycling through the new ban. While no one will be checking people’s garbage, the department said in a press release this week that the North Carolina Division of Waste Management will enforce the ban at disposal facilities such as landfills and transfer stations if necessary.

Johnson said this ban may have motivated the commissioners to further pursue recycling projects but that it isn’t the only reason they urged the public works department to expand.

“We had been looking for the past three years to do it,” Johnson remarked.

If the pilot program goes well, the county hopes to add containers for plastics at the new Wilmoth Road Center and the Ararat River at Highway 268 center. This would provide people across the county easy access to recycle their plastics.

The North Surry Convenience Center was chosen for the pilot program because of its proximity to several schools. Johnson said schools in the North Surry region had been in the process of talking with the county about a recycling program during the last few months. He said some schools currently have recycling projects of their own, but now they will be able to recycle plastics on a large scale.

“We think it’s important, number one, because of the environment. Number two, because it will extend the life of our landfill ... And we just feel like it’s the right thing to do,” Johnson explained.

Once the new container is placed at the North Surry location, it will be open to the public five days a week. People will need to see an attendant to deposit plastics, just as they would do with other materials.

Dennis Bledsoe, assistant public works director, said people can bring the plastics in garbage bags, but they must be clean. He said, for example, that people should make sure they pour out leftover milk before recycling a jug.

“Cleanliness is a key on this,” he said.

To evaluate the success of the project, the public works department will look at how many people are utilizing the opportunity, how cost-efficient the program is, and how clean the plastics are. The program will be evaluated over a three- to six-month period. It will cost \$13,266 for the containers and \$205 per load with a handling fee of \$30 per ton.

People will be able to recycle plastic types 1 through 7 at the North Surry location. The plastic type number is indicated on items by three cyclic arrows with a number inside.

According to the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Surry County averaged 1.06 pounds of plastic bottles recycled per person from 2007 to 2008. The average county recovery of plastic bottles per capita is 3.81 pounds, so Surry is significantly below the state average.

But Bledsoe offers hope. “It’s steadily increasing,” he said.

The county offers 14 locations across the county for recycling of newspaper, magazines, aluminum cans, glass bottles, cardboard and auto batteries. Information and telephone numbers for the landfill and convenience center locations can be found on the county’s public works Web page: <http://www.co.surry.nc.us/Departments/PublicWorks/PublicWorks.htm>.

Contact Meghann Evans at mevans@mtairynews.com or at 719-1952.

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