

Solid Waste in the News

Alexis Baker, Environmental Programs Coordinator

Recently, there has been a lot of dialogue about Henderson County's solid waste in the news. Issues such as materials bans, garbage hauling permits, the possibility of garbage "franchising", and capital improvements in Henderson County have come to the forefront of discussion. As a slight detour from my usual column, I would like to explain these issues and attempt to clear up any misinformation or confusion.

As many of you are aware, a material ban was issued on October 1, 2009 from the State of North Carolina. This new ban mandates that plastic bottles, oil filters, yard waste, and wooden pallets may not be disposed of in the landfill or transfer station. In other words, these materials should be recycled and facilities in the County exist at the Stoney Mountain Recycling Center to properly recycle these items. Many of you, however, may not be aware that many items have been illegal to toss in the garbage for several years, but have not gained as much media attention, such as aluminum cans, antifreeze, oil, lead-acid batteries, and white goods (e.g. metal appliances and items). The full legislation (North Carolina General Statute 130A-309.10(f)) may be read at <http://p2pays.org/BannedMaterials/index.asp>.

Second, there is the issue of garbage hauling permits in the County. Under the North Carolina Solid Waste Rules (15A NCAC 13B.0105), which can be accessed at <http://www.wastenotnc.org/swhome/rules.asp>, "vehicles or containers used for the collection and transportation by whatever means, including but not limited to, highway, rail, and navigable waterway, of garbage, or refuse containing garbage, shall be covered, leakproof, durable, and of easily cleanable construction". In order to comply with this state mandate, Henderson County has established a compliance schedule for garbage haulers, which also includes recycling compliance as mandated by the North Carolina General Assembly:

1. 2010 Permit Process: Identify all non-compliant equipment
2. 2011 Permit Process: Recycling incorporated into garbage hauling operation
3. 2010-2010: No new non-compliant equipment permitted
4. 2014 Permit Process: All equipment must be compliant

Recently, a Solid Waste Feasibility Study was conducted by a consultant for Henderson County. This study may be read at <http://www.hendersoncountync.org/solidwaste/>. In this study, garbage and recycling issues were explored. The consultant identified that the best way to increase garbage and recycling services and reduce costs for Henderson County residents would be to have garbage haulers pick up both garbage and recycling for all residents in the County. This would mean that residents who do not presently have recycling service would gain this service. By encouraging recycling, they are likely to be able to finish up a garbage load before returning to pick up the recycling. Moreover, the Stoney Mountain Transfer Station offers single-stream recycling (that is, recyclable containers can be combined with paper and cardboard) for \$26 per ton. Haulers (and residents) who separate their recyclables into paper and containers can still recycle for free. Compare this to the tipping fee for garbage disposal at \$52 per ton. It is half the price for garbage haulers to dispose of single stream recyclables.

Third, there has been a lot of discussion about franchising. While this recommendation is not under consideration by the Board of Commissioners at present, there is no indication that a future franchising agreement would displace any garbage haulers with compliant equipment, increase garbage fees for residents, or increase air pollution. A franchise system of collection could offer an exclusive territory to one or more haulers or be nonexclusive similar to the permit system currently in effect. The possible benefits of franchising are cost reductions for garbage and recycling collection for the haulers and in turn the Citizens. The price for garbage collection under a Franchise system would be established by competitive bids and not assigned by the County or Hauler. The most significant trade-off for a Franchise system is the reduction or loss of choice a Citizen has in selecting a garbage hauler. However, the Board of Commissioners commented that the first priority with the County's permit haulers is assisting them in complying with the state mandates mentioned earlier.

Finally, there are exciting capital improvements in the works for the Henderson County Transfer Station at Stoney Mountain. These improvements are paid for through an enterprise fund. This enterprise fund is generated solely from solid waste revenue and not property taxes. The entrance to the scales at the Stoney Mountain facility will be relocated and separated from the Citizen convenience center. New entrance and exit scales will allow trucks to weigh upon entrance and exit rather than backing up traffic on Stoney Mountain Road. A new convenience center will be built to include a full-time electronics and household hazardous waste collection. A separate materials recovery facility will also be built. A materials recovery facility (MRF) will collect recyclables, sort them, and ready them for marketing. Haulers will be able to tip their recyclables onto the floor of the MRF rather than wasting time tipping their loads into bins or sorting. The costs of transporting recyclables to South Carolina will be cut and a new source of revenue will be generated to increase solid waste services.

For more information contact Alexis Baker, Environmental Programs Coordinator, at 694-6524 or by email at alexisbaker@hendersoncountync.org