

papers only \$25,000 a year statewide—enough to represent a nuisance to publishers but too little to influence printing decisions. And Stevens says the fee singled out newspapers while ignoring certain other problematic paper products, particularly disposable diapers. Yet Stevens says he recognizes the newsprint disposal problem and believes the industry is willing to help solve it. “I think the problem is all of us, and I think it’s silly to claim you are not part of the problem if you are,” says Stevens.

Local governments opposed a 50-cents-a-ton waste disposal fee to be collected at landfills and remitted to the state, calling the fee a raid on a county revenue source. Regan says some counties which already have well-developed solid waste

management programs—such as Mecklenburg—saw no benefit to using part of waste disposal fees to help the state pay its administrative costs or to help set up recycling programs in other counties. Still, Regan says the counties are open to discussion on the subject. “I don’t think we ever take non-negotiable positions,” he says.

Primary sources of funding for the Solid Waste Trust Fund created in the bill are a \$300,000 appropriation from the state’s General Fund, and a 10 percent share of the one fee that did survive the bill—a 1 percent levy on retail tire sales, which will generate \$389,000 annually for the fund. An additional \$500,000 was appropriated to be matched by private money for a study to analyze the state’s waste stream. But compared to

No Bottle Bill for North Carolina—Yet

A July 1989 poll included one finding that should have shaken up North Carolina merchants and soft drink distributors. The poll by FG*I, a Chapel Hill public relations and marketing firm, found 70 percent of the state’s citizens favor a 5-cent deposit on beer and soft drink containers. In other words, they want a bottle bill.

But despite this apparent strong public support, bottle bills have gotten no respect from the General Assembly. A total of 18 bottle bills have been introduced and killed in the legislature since 1969, according to Sam Whitehurst, a lobbyist for the N.C. Soft Drink Association. The latest defeat came when a container deposit provision included in the Solid Waste Management Act was excised by a House panel during the 1989 session.

Yet some lawmakers see the bottle bill as a major piece of the solid waste reduction puzzle. “If you ever want to get serious about solid waste, a bottle bill is the way to do it,” said Rep. David Diamont (D-Surry) during House debate on the Solid Waste Management Act. “We can’t get it passed because the special-interest groups have too much clout in the legislature. They contribute too much to our campaigns.”

Nine states currently have traditional deposit laws on the books, and most appear to be working. The theory behind the bottle bill is simple: people aren’t likely to throw away a container that is worth something. The mechanics of bottle bills are simple too. Distributors charge retailers the deposit. They in turn charge their customers. When the consumer has used up what was in the container, he returns it to the retail store for a refund. The retailer then returns the container to the distributor. California, the tenth state to enact a bottle bill, offers a variation. The state charges beverage wholesalers a penny deposit. Consumers are asked to return the containers to redemption centers, where they get the penny back, along with the scrap value of the container and a share of unclaimed deposits.¹

Although bottle bills target only about 5 percent of the waste stream, they have proven successful at reducing litter and encouraging recycling. Oregon claims a 90 percent redemption rate for beer and soft-drink bottles.² New York state’s bottle bill has resulted in the recycling of aluminum, glass, and plastic beverage containers at rates of 60, 80, and 50 percent, respectively.³

Bottle bill opponents are quick to point out

major increases budgeted for education, roads, and prisons, the General Assembly barely opened its purse for what may be the most significant issue facing the state over the next decade.

"What's needed is money for university research, for grants to the counties, for various kinds of research," says Hackney. "Really, we would like to have—and I think the problem merits it—somewhere in the order of \$5 million . . . It's the perennial environmental problem, which is underfunding."

The North Carolina bill was patterned after Florida's Senate Bill 1192, ratified in June 1988, which set a 30 percent recycling goal by 1994 and placed the responsibility for establishing and enforcing recycling programs on the counties. But

the Florida program is much better financed. A \$25 million Solid Waste Management Trust Fund provides local governments with grants to fund capital expenditures and subsidize initial operations. A 10-cent-per-ton advance disposal fee is imposed on newsprint, with papers receiving a refund if they buy recycled newsprint. The fee increases to 50 cents if less than 50 percent of the newsprint is being recycled by October 1992. Advance disposal fees also will be levied on containers if 50 percent of containers sold are not being recycled by October 1992.⁴⁵

These provisions give the Florida law the teeth some say are lacking in North Carolina by providing strong financial incentives for local

that deposit legislation does not require the recycling by industry of the containers collected. But even though a bottle bill does not mandate the reuse of collected materials, the laws of economics do: manufacturers who collect tons of clean, marketable, sorted recyclables are not going to pay to have them dumped in a landfill.

Retailers, although compensated for the inconvenience of refunding deposits, often oppose bottle bills. They argue that sorting the containers means time, trouble, and increased labor costs, and the deposit adds to the cost of the product. Paying customers may be inconvenienced by having to stand in line behind people who only want to redeem bottles or cans. The bottles and cans also could attract roaches and would require at least some sacrifice of retail space for storage. Container manufacturers are against bottle bills too, and have fought them in part by supporting litter-control efforts and recycling programs. "We don't like bottle bills," says Jim Heimberger of the Carolinas Glass Recycling Program, an industry-sponsored recycling program. "It may have started out as a tactic, but recycling has evolved into an ethic for us. Once you've got a white hat on, it feels good."

Heimberger says a bottle bill in North Carolina would be devastating because it would take the lucrative container recycling

business away from community-based recycling programs and small, private recyclers. "It effectively destroys those programs," he says. "You pass a bottle bill, and you've taken the bread and butter out of it for those small recyclers." Durward F. "Butch" Gunnells, a lobbyist for the North Carolina Soft Drink Association, says coupling a bottle bill with widespread curbside recycling would create a wasteful dual system and would hurt curbside programs.

But Rep. Joe Hackney (D-Orange), who engineered the passage of the Solid Waste Management Act, disputes such arguments. "It's the single most effective way to deal with bottles and cans," says Hackney. "It would be nice not to have to have a recycling program for certain kinds of containers, because recycling programs don't make money. They cost money." Hackney says the most effective argument bottle bill opponents have is a political argument. "Stores don't want to mess with it, and they speak up," he says.

—Amy Carr

FOOTNOTES

¹Environmental Defense Fund, *Coming Full Circle: Successful Recycling Today*, 1988, pp. 72-73.

²Philip J. Prete, *A Solid Waste Agenda for North Carolina Cities and Counties*, The Conservation Foundation of North Carolina, May 1989, p. 21.

³Environmental Defense Fund, p. 70.