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SMITH BILL TO ENHANCE PLASTIC RECYCLING IN NEW JERSEY ADVANCES

TRENTON - A bill sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which would require a higher recycling standard for plastic packaging sold in New Jersey to promote recycling, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and decrease our dependence on foreign oil was approved today by the Senate Environment Committee by a vote of 3-0, with two abstentions.

"New Jersey is the most densely populated State in the nation, and every inch of unspoiled land is precious," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. "We cannot give up acres and acres of open space to landfills, and we need to conserve the resources we have available. By promoting recycling, we can preserve our valuable natural resources and encourage environmentally-safe practices from our business partners in the Garden State."

The bill, a Senate Committee substitute for S-556, known as the "Plastic Container Recycling Enhancement Act," would require that every rigid container manufactured, sold, or offered for sale in New Jersey be composed of at least 25% recycled plastic content by January 1, 2008. The bill would also require every rigid plastic container bearing a product that is sold in New Jersey be composed of at least 25% recycled content. The bill makes exemptions from the recycled content standards for small businesses, and for plastic beverage containers and containers bearing personal care products, such as aspirin bottles, as well as containers regulated by the federal government that contain toxic products or are intended for the shipment of hazardous materials.

"The recycled content standards are not onerous, and will go a long way towards encouraging greater use of, and greater participation in, plastics recycling," said Senator Smith. "This bill represents a compromise from its original form that accomplishes our environmental goals without unduly harming businesses in New Jersey, and protecting our State's security by ensuring the integrity of hazardous chemical containers."

Additionally, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) would be authorized to exempt manufacturers if they find, in writing, that the recycled materials required to meet the 25% standard are not available, or that it would be technologically infeasible to use plastic containers with the new recycled-content standards.

"DEP would keep a watchful eye on this program, and if it turns out we're asking too much from our manufacturers, we can scale it back," said Senator Smith. "We cannot ask businesses to do the impossible, but at the same time, we want to have the most recycled plastic usage we possibly can in the Garden State."

The bill would also establish a Plastic Container Recycling Council to study ways to increase the use of recycled plastic content and to educate and inform the public on the issues and benefits of recycling plastics. The council would be required to issue a report to the Governor and the Legislature no later than two years after its first meeting.

"Part and parcel of mandating higher recycled content in plastic containers is educating the public as to the need and benefits of recycling plastic materials," said Senator Smith. "We need greater participation from the public in local plastic recycling programs, to ensure that we have enough recycled content to meet our standards. The Plastic Container Recycling Council would be our point-agency to promote public recycling, and I look forward to hearing their recommendations."

Senator Smith also noted that many of the nation's largest manufacturers already require increasing levels of recycled plastic be used in their packaging, indicating that the technology is available and cost-effective enough to produce recycled plastic packaging. However, some manufacturers still rely on unrecycled plastics, and rigid plastic packaging containers represent a significant component of the solid waste stream in this State.

"We have landfills in New Jersey that are busting at the seams, and we need to relieve some of the pressure by encouraging more recycling," said Senator Smith. "Through this bill, we would be promoting environmentally-sound solutions to our solid waste problem, our energy dependence, as well as pushing for a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and conserving natural resources for future generations of New Jerseyans."

The bill now heads to the full Senate for consideration.