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SMITH BILL TO ENHANCE STATE'S RECYCLING EFFORT OF PLASTIC CONTAINERS ADVANCES IN ASSEMBLY

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 Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee today by a vote of 4-2, with one abstention.

"Global warming is a proven scientific phenomenon, aggravated by our increased dependence on the production of petroleum products, like plastics," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the Chairman of the Senate Environment Committee. "Without a greater emphasis on the re-use and recycling of plastics, we will continue feeding into the global warming problem in New Jersey."

The bill, 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.

"Recycling technologies have already proven to be successful in maximizing our natural resources and minimizing our impact on the environment," said Senator Smith. "We should try to promote the use of recycled products as much as possible."

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.

"We're not trying to punish the business community with unrealistic recycled plastic standards and goals," said Senator Smith. "I think the 25 percent standard is realistic, but if we don't have the technology or means to achieve it, we don't want to push this down industry's throat."

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.

"These higher standards of recycled plastics cannot be achieved without everyone doing their part," said Senator Smith. "The Council will be at the front of efforts to educate consumers on the need to recycle. Without an ample supply of recyclable plastic, efforts to promote greater recycling can't get off the ground."

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.

"Many companies are already pushing the envelope on using recycled plastics in packaging," said Senator Smith. "Some have already reached the 25 percent standard outlined in our bill, and some

have surpassed that level. We should encourage all of New Jersey's businesses to reach for more environmentally-friendly ways to package and ship their products."

The bill now heads to the full Assembly for consideration. It was approved by the Senate in May by a vote of 25-10.