

Senator Smith Bill to Turn Waste into Energy Passes Environment & Energy Committee

The legislation would require certain generators of solid waste to separate and recycle food waste to be converted into energy

Trenton- Legislation sponsored by Senator Bob Smith, which requires certain generators of solid waste to separate and recycle food waste, was approved today by the Senate Environment and Energy Committee.

The bill, S-771, encourages a constant source of separated food waste and construction of more food waste-to-energy facilities in the state, which convert food waste into fuel used to generate electricity. "This is an intelligent alternative to improve our environment," said Senator Smith. "We have a problem with waste in this country, and recycling solid waste is a viable system that will produce energy to provide to our homes, schools and businesses. It will also decrease our dependency on fossil fuels." According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in 2012, the United States threw away more than 36 million tons of food, from that, less than 5 percent was recycled. Much of it ended up rotting in landfills, releasing methane into the atmosphere. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas which contributes to climate change. The EPA estimates that if 50 percent of the food waste generated each year in the U.S. were anaerobically digested, enough electricity would be generated to power 2.5 million homes for a year.

"This is common sense and it works to resolve multiple problems, from generation of energy so we can work to becoming more energy efficient, to addressing our landfill issues, as well as combatting global warming," said Senator Smith.

Under the bill, starting January 1, 2017, every large food waste generator that is located within 25 miles of an authorized recycling facility and that generates an average projected volume of 104 or more tons per year of food waste would be required to separate that food waste and send the separated food waste to an authorized recycling facility that has available capacity and will accept it.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) would be required to adopt regulations concerning; a) record keeping and reporting requirements; b) guidelines for businesses to follow to determine whether they are subject to the bill; c) a list of food waste products that must be source separated and recycled; d) standards for the enclosed, on-site composting or anaerobic digestion of food waste; and e) a list of actions businesses may take to reduce the amount of food waste they generate. The DEP would publish on its Internet website the name, location, and contact information for each authorized food waste recycling facility in the State.

Connecticut, Massachusetts and a number of large cities including New York adopted laws in the past few years that will require food scraps to be separated and recycled by hospitals, supermarkets, college cafeterias and other establishments that generate large amounts of waste.

Beginning January 1, 2020, large food waste generators that produce an average projected volume of 52 or more tons per year of food waste would have to comply with these requirements.

Anaerobic digestion is the process by which organic matter such as animal or food waste is broken down to produce biogas and biofertiliser. This process happens in the absence of oxygen in a sealed, oxygen-free tank called an anaerobic digester.

The committee approved the bill by a vote of 4-0. It next heads to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.