

Many Greenville Clubs, Restaurants Ignoring Recycling Law  
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With the General Assembly's passage of House Bill 267 to ensure the recycling of beverage containers by ABC permit holders, one would expect that Greenville area clubs, bars and restaurants would be submitting plans and taking action. However, not every business is participating.

Despite the obvious environmental advantages of recycling, only a few have set up and utilized a recycling plan. While ABC permit holders like Pantana Bobs and 519, both bars in downtown Greenville, and Greenville Country Club and Ironwood Country Clubs are recycling, officials at other Greenville establishments like Buffalo Wild Wings on Arlington Boulevard are claiming they know nothing about the law.

Yet, news stations like News 14 Carolina and WRAL publicized the amendment requiring ABC permit holders to recycle and each ABC permit holder also received a letter from the ABC Commission. In the ABC Commission letter, not only were permit holders informed about the law, they were also provided with a fact sheet and a tip sheet for starting a recycling program.

House Bill 267 requires some ABC permit holders to submit a recycling plan for their used bottles and cans in order to obtain their permit to sell alcohol. According to the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, this bill will affect 8,000 of the 25,000 currently active, pending, temporary and permanent permits in North Carolina. The original bill was passed in 2005, but was ratified in 2007 and made effective Jan. 1, 2008. The amended bill states that establishments holding on-premises malt beverage permits, on-premises unfortified wine permits, on-premises wine permits, and mixed beverages permits shall separate, store, and provide collection for the recycling of all recycle beverage containers on the premises.

The bill allows current permit holders one year to implement a recycling plan and requires those seeking to obtain a permit to submit a plan for recycling all glass bottles, aluminum cans and plastic bottles before they can be granted an ABC permit.

The law comes amid a steady decline in beverage container recycling. According to a news story on WRAL in January 2008, North Carolinians throw away enough glass "to fill tractor-trailers that would stretch from Wilmington to Durham." Since glass bottles can be recycled an infinite number of times, all of that wasted glass could have been recycled in any of the three glass plants in North Carolina to make numerous new products.

Rachel Eckert, a waste management analyst at the Natural Resources Agency, said glass can be used for more glass containers, ground cover, products like concrete and bricks, and parking stops.

Not only does recycling glass bottles help save natural resources, it also saves energy. If a person was to recycle 200 glass bottles each week, it would save enough energy to light a conventional light bulb for 800 hours, according to the National Recycling Coalition Web site.

According to Tony Snow, a bartender at 4<sup>th</sup> Street Distiller, a non-recycling bar, he serves around 500 beer bottles on Thursday nights, the busiest night for most college bars. Those glass bottles could be used to save energy and create new products, but instead they get tossed with the rest of the trash.

When asked about their recycling plan, several Greenville business owners claimed recycling is too expensive. Cheryl Tafoya, Greenville's recycling coordinator, agrees that the new law has added some extra expenses to the downtown bars' budgets, however, she said she has noticed an increase in recycling in the downtown area since the inception of House Bill 267.

In a case study found on the state agency's Web site, one can see how much it can cost to recycle. At Mellow Mushroom in Raleigh, a successful recycling restaurant in one of the case studies, the cost for weekly container recycling is \$120 per month along with the monthly \$500 fee for biweekly trash and cardboard; and at Laughing Seed Café in Asheville the cost is only \$20 per month per recycling container for weekly pick up in addition to the normal \$200 monthly fee for the pickup of Laughing Seed's two rolling Dumpsters, according to the state agency's Web site.

The agency's Eckert states that local governments can apply for state grants for up to \$30,000 to set up collection and drop-off sites. Greenville has chosen not to apply for the grant in hopes that the local ABC permit holders would be able to pay for their own, according to Tafoya.

An employee who asked not to be named at Rumors, another club in downtown Greenville, said that the county and city doesn't provide any help with the pickup of recycling. According to the North Carolina Department of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance Web site, only five counties in North Carolina provide on-site recycling for ABC permit holders and 52 allow permit holders to drop off at public recycling centers.

Greenville City Manager Wayne Bowers confirmed that Pitt County doesn't offer public site drop off or on-site pick up and said that local ABC permit holders need to contact a waste management company independently. However, Buncombe County, home of Laughing Seed Café and Jack of the Wood, two establishments described on the N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention Web site, doesn't provide pick up or drop off either, but according to description they are doing well without those options.

An employee at Greenville's Club Stillife on Fifth Street stated that the club doesn't recycle its bottles even though the owners are aware of the law. "We have yet to see anyone be reprimanded or fined for not recycling, so why bother?" said Meg Shafer, a Stillife employee.

LoRirta Pinnix, assistant counsel at the ABC Commission, confirms that no ABC permit holder has been punished since the law has only been in effect since January. Yet the letter that Pinnix personally signed sent to every North Carolina ABC permit holder states that "failure to have a recycling program in place by January 1, 2008 could result in administrative fines and suspension of all ABC permits."

Some Greenville ABC permit holders are doing their part to recycle. Employees at clubs located in downtown Greenville such as Pantana Bobs and 519 said they did know about the law. These clubs provide garbage cans with holes just big enough for a bottle to fit through or place signs over their trash bins so that their customers can recycle their own bottles. “I really didn’t want to have to dig through huge trash cans of cigarette butts, trash, cans, bottles and cups to separate the recyclables, so I was glad when customers followed the signs well,” said Drew Tharrington, a bartender at 519.

One can easily spot the law-abiding downtown establishments by driving by their Dumpster locations or just watching where their patrons or bartenders dispose their bottles. Rehab Lounge, a Greenville club that opened in 2007, is definitely not a recycling establishment. When a customer finishes his or her beer bottle it is thrown into a giant trash can along with plastic cups, paper, napkins and several other things. Around 2 a.m., when Rehab closes, anyone can see the employees dump all the trash into several trash bags and put each bag into the same Dumpster in the alley.

However, Cheryl Lafoya, Greenville’s recycling coordinator, said she regularly “check[s] out” the Dumpsters downtown and usually sees several full recycling bins waiting for pickup, so it seems some bars and clubs are recycling like they should while others are not.

Rachel Eckert of the Natural Resources Agency adds, “We have had probably 15 or 20 new recycling companies start up and expand in North Carolina to help businesses comply with this legislation.”

Greenville Country Club and Ironwood Country Club also recycle their beverage containers. Ironwood employees said they are unaware of House Bill 267, but have always recycled the used bottles in their clubhouses and have provided designated bins for members to recycle their own bottles as they come off the course. Greenville Country Club employee Amy Funderburk is also well aware of the law. In fact Funderburk responded, “Of course we recycle, it’s the law,” when asked if the country club recycles its bottles. Greenville County Club, like Ironwood, recycles the used bottles in bins under the bar in its clubhouse and also has cans with signs directing members where to dispose of their beverage containers.

Restaurants in Greenville, such as Ham’s and Applebee’s, also recycle. Employees at both establishments had heard of House Bill 267 but had already implemented recycling programs before the law was passed. Restaurants don’t have to rely on their customers to recycle their used containers since employees are the ones who clean the tables and can take care of the used bottles themselves.

While North Carolina may have just passed this new bill, several ABC permit holders had already been recycling their beverage containers. Several case studies located on the ABC Container Recycling section of the pollution prevention agency’s Web site show how easy it can be to start a recycling program at any location.

According to the N.C. Division of Pollution Prevention Web site, Laughing Seed Café, a restaurant and bar located in Asheville, has been recycling since 1991. Jason Sellers, the kitchen manager at Laughing Seed, said that there were no doubts about whether the establishment would recycle or not. Currently, the restaurant recycles all glass, office paper, plastic buckets, cardboard and cooking oil and is working on creating a compost heap as well as a way to recycle its take-out containers. Laughing Seed has placed clearly marked recycle bins near the exit and in the kitchen so that both employees and customers can recycle their waste.

Jack of the Wood, a bar also located in Asheville, has recycled its brown, green and clear glass, cardboard and office paper since 1997. The bar shares an outdoor recycling container with Laughing Seed Café and the owner, Joan Eckert, says the process of recycling is incredibly easy, even though Buncombe County doesn't offer public on-site recycling services nor does the county allow public recycling drop-off for beverage containers generated at business sites.

Jack of the Wood owner, Joan Eckert, says that she thinks the law is "great" since it will require people who may not usually recycle to do so. "Some areas aren't as environmentally-friendly as earthy Asheville, so I'm glad to see that the law is finally requiring people in other areas to do their part," Eckert said, according to the pollution prevention agency.

A Raleigh casual dining restaurant named Mellow Mushroom recycles its brown, green and clear glass, cardboard and metal as well. Employers are educated about the program and do all the recycling at Mellow Mushroom. They collect the empty bottles after clearing tables and take them outside where there are separate barrels for each color. Each week, Mellow Mushroom fills four barrels with brown glass and one each with green and clear glass. According to the National Recycling Coalition, if each of those barrels can hold 200 bottles, Mellow Mushroom alone is saving enough energy to light a conventional light bulb for 4,800 hours.

Seeing how easy it has been to recycle in restaurants and bars like Mellow Mushroom and Laughing Seed Cafe, some say that ABC permit holders in Greenville should have easily stepped up to do their part in recycling as well, especially with the recycling law now in effect.

Reed Avren contributed to the reporting of this story.