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North Country Lawmaker Puts Forth Environmental Legislation

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With the permit approved, Littleton Transfer Station Manager Brian Patnoe, seen here at the station in September, is seeking to transform the Littleton facility into a regional transfer station. (File photo by Robert Blechl)

A local state representative has submitted several environmental bills for New Hampshire's 2022 legislative session, among them increased fines for littering and a bottle and can redemption bill, which, if made into law, would be a first for the Granite State.

State Rep. Tim Egan, D-Sugar Hill, seeks to increase the fines for littering by 20 percent.

It makes sense for a state that promotes tourism, a state that many people live in for its quality of life, and a state that has a treasured state parks system, he said.

“All of that says we should be taking care of our environment and the simplest way to do that is not litter, and therefore fines for littering should be as harsh as possible to keep people from doing it,” said Egan.

Littering in New Hampshire constitutes a criminal misdemeanor, with Class A misdemeanors carrying fines of up to \$2,000 and Class B fines up to \$1,200.

“This bill does two things,” said Egan. “The first is it gets people to pay attention that littering is something they can control and they can manage and keep themselves from getting fined just by disposing of their waste appropriately.”

The second piece addresses the lack of funding for New Hampshire Fish and Game Conservation by giving the increased revenue from increased fines into funding for Fish and Game officers, he said.

“The increase in the fines will go to funding Fish and Game conservation officers because we don’t have enough folks to police the parks and trails and all the places where littering and illegal dumping take place,” said Egan. “People get fines for speeding and you hopefully slow down. Increasing fines for littering will hopefully stop people from littering and maintain the quality of life and the environmental beauty — why we all live in New Hampshire. If the stewards of that safety and beauty are the conservation officers, then that’s where the funding should go to support them.”

For whichever amount a court decides to fine an offender for a littering offense, the fine would increase by 20 percent and go into a fund to recruit and maintain conservation officers.

The littering bill focuses on two areas — trash along highways and municipal roads and trash in state parks.

For the bottle bill, Egan said the reason he filed it is because there needs to be a conversation in New Hampshire about trash.

The bottle bill came out of talks with lawmakers that include state Sen. Erin Hennessey, R-Littleton; state Reps. Linda Massimilla, D-Littleton; Dennis Thompson, R-Stewartstown; and Edith Tucker, D-Randolph; as well as a number of groups and stakeholders.

“We don’t need to build more landfills, we need to think about putting less in landfills to make the existing landfills last longer,” said Egan. “How do we begin as a state to look at what we do for trash maintenance ... I wanted to start the conversation. A bottle bill is a big elephant. Everybody wants to talk about it. Will it be a success? I don’t know. Is there a lot of support for it? I’ve already heard from alcohol and soft drink companies and their lobby groups saying they think it’s bad policy. I know it’s not a popular topic. Consumers might say why do you want to make my drink cost 10 cents more. Well, if you go and recycle it you get the 10 cents back.”

Promoting more recycling puts less trash — and bottles and cans make up a good chunk of that trash — in landfills, he said.

A bottle bill could also develop business, such as redemption centers, and be a revenue generator for town transfer stations, he said.

And if people don’t redeem their 10 cents, the money goes to the state, which has to maintain the environment for littering and figure out where the bottles go, said Egan.

“Either way, the conversation has been started about why we need to put less in our landfills, and one of the biggest culprits is cans and bottles of alcoholic beverages, soft drinks, iced teas, energy drinks and water bottles,” he said. “The idea is to push something forward that reduces the impact of trash in landfills and pushes the state and constituents and leaders on how we manage our solid waste and be more respectful of environmental efforts that can actually be revenue generators, like a bottle bill redemption program.”

Egan’s bottle bill is patterned after legislation in Rhode Island.

Called New Hampshire’s Beverage Container Deposit Recycling Act of 2022, its findings state that recycling collection rates for single-use beverage containers are significantly lower in the Granite State than recycling collection rates in states with deposit systems.

Beverage containers for redemption are defined as any container made of glass, plastic, or metal, or a combination of them.

In addition to concern from alcohol and soft drink beverage lobbyists, Egan also had a meeting with members of the packaged beverage association in New Hampshire.

“Obviously, they are not in favor of it,” he said. “Their big concern is the reverse distribution, what happens to the bottles when they are redeemed when someone takes them to the store and gets their dime back, what does that do, how does that happen, and how does that cost businesses.”

The transfer station managers in his House district, however, think it’s a good idea, and those stations can make money when people don’t want to deal with the redemption piece and just leave the bottles at the station, said Egan.

Two other bills also seek to reduce waste going into landfills.

“One is a compost bill, not mandatory, but an option for transfer stations to take food waste compost and partner with an area farm within their district of that transfer station to be able to put a bin out and collect that food waste and use it for organic farming or animals,” he said.

The other proposal is a reclamation bill that would allow transfer stations to take construction debris from homeowners with the station’s district, from license contractors, and from town construction projects and be able to re-purpose the material and put it up for sale instead of putting it in a dumpster and then having it go to a landfill, where construction debris makes up a large part of land-filled content, said Egan.

“They will be able to sell windows, doors, curbstones, cinder blocks,” he said.

With the current housing boom and rising construction costs, reclamation could also help people find lower-cost solutions, he said.

Discussions about the proposed pieces of legislation also involved stakeholders such as the Forest Lake Association, North Country Alliance For Balanced Change, and the Conservation Law Foundation.

“We are a consumer society and we do need landfills, but we need to do a better job of it,” said Egan. “The land in New Hampshire is something that we all enjoy. For outdoor activity, some make their livelihoods out of tourism, people who run kayaking tours, hiking tours, manage ski trails. All that stuff is tied to maintaining a positive environment and we’re going to shoot ourselves in the foot if we don’t work a little harder at it.”

Robert Blechl

