

2010 VACo Achievement Award Nomination

Isle Be Green - Plastic Bag Recycling Program *Isle of Wight County, Virginia*

NEED FOR THE PROGRAM

In early 2007, Isle of Wight County Board of Supervisor member, Thomas J. Wright, III, began talking about the possibility of banning the use of plastic bags in Isle of Wight County. Supervisor Wright's driving concern was the County's agricultural industry – primarily the cotton and livestock farmers. Isle of Wight's agricultural community has been greatly impacted by plastic bag litter. Plastic often becomes entangled in crops and contaminates it. In cotton, this “trash” cannot be eliminated through the ginning process causing the grade, or quality, of the cotton to be reduced – thus reducing the farmer's profit. Local livestock farmers incur veterinary costs and livestock deaths when their livestock ingest the plastic trash littering the fields. In addition to the impact seen by the farming community, Isle of Wight also recognizes plastic bag litter has negative impacts on the health of the Chesapeake Bay and other economic activity in the county and the region. Additionally, tourism is a driving economic factor in Isle of Wight, and plastic bag litter impacts the aesthetic appeal of the County as well as surrounding localities.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION



Recognizing that the littering of plastic bags is an environmental hazard and an eyesore, as well as a nuisance and financial burden to farmers, Supervisor Wright didn't just talk about banning plastic bags, he introduced a resolution to the Isle of Wight Board of Supervisors requesting that the General Assembly adopt legislation that would grant localities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia the enabling authority to ban or discourage the use of plastic bags. The Isle of Wight Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution and requested that Isle of Wight's representatives in the Virginia General Assembly bring forth the enabling legislation.

While the enabling legislation was not adopted, it did spur action at the state level. Spurred by the Isle of Wight initiative, the Virginia General Assembly tasked the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality with conducting two studies on the overall impacts of plastic bags. Simultaneously, a Plastic Bag Coalition was created by Virginia Delegate William K. Barlow and Virginia Senator Fredrick M. Quayle along with Isle of Wight County and the Virginia Retail Federation. The Plastic Bag Coalition is made up of stakeholders to address the problems that plastic bags create and to look for opportunities to more appropriately address the disposal of plastic bags. Membership includes: the Virginia Retail Alliance, the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission, HR Clean, the Virginia Department of Environmental, local governments, plastic bag recyclers, plastic bag manufacturers and many others. Isle of Wight County staff serves as the central core and administrative arm of the Coalition. The Coalition has tasked itself with creating an action plan to attack the problem proactively through consumer education, examination of existing laws/regulations and increased recycling opportunities for citizens. After much research and analysis over the past two (2) years, the Coalition recognized that consumer behavior must change if there is to be a decrease in the amount of plastic bag litter in Isle of Wight.

Isle of Wight County was awarded grants from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Virginia Retail Alliance and the South Hampton Roads Resources Conservation and Development Council to implement a pilot plastic bag recycling project within the County. The pilot project is the first of its kind in the Commonwealth and will hopefully be a model for other localities. The project has several principal components: increase recycling opportunities; enlist commercial support; promote the use of reusable shopping bags; and education and outreach to the community.

Increased recycling opportunities

The County, with support from the Coalition, has partnered with local commercial property owners, recyclers, retailers and others to establish efficient and clean drop off recycling collection options and promote their locations to the public. Initially, the County installed plastic bag recycling containers for the shoppers at one of Isle of Wight's



primary shopping centers and placed plastic bag recycling containers at the County's three (3) most heavily trafficked convenience centers ("household waste disposal sites"). The County has expanded the Program to offer recycling containers at the remaining five (5) convenience center sites and many other locations throughout the county.

Trex plastic bag recycling container used in the Program.

Enlist corporate support

Because of the Isle of Wight initiative, Farm Fresh, a prominent grocery store chain in Hampton Roads, as a pilot program for their chain, has eliminated most plastic grocery bags in its two locations that principally serve Isle of Wight County citizens. Farm Fresh now offers only paper bags during the checkout process in those locations and encourages the use of reusable shopping bags by offering a five cent (\$.05) per bag discount for each reusable shopping bag used by their customers. Many of the recycling bins utilized in the Program were donated by Trex, a Virginia based company who utilizes plastic bags to manufacture composite lumber. Additionally, Trex and Farm Fresh agreed to co-sponsor a plastic bag recycling drive in our elementary schools which has already recycled more than 410,529 plastic bags (5,864.7 pounds of bags).

During the August 2009 – November 2009 timeframe the local Disabled American Veterans (DAV) thrift store collected more than 49,000 plastic bags (701.5 pounds) as part of Isle of Wight's retail recycling efforts. Based on their participation in the Program, the local DAV

thrift store has identified recycling plastic bags as a potential funding source for their activities and has expanded its recycling efforts to include other partner DAVs in the region.

Promote the use of reusable bags

Through reusable bag giveaways and plastic bag exchange days, where citizens trade ten (10) plastic shopping bags for a reusable bag, the County distributes and promotes the sale and use of reusable shopping bags as citizens visit grocery, convenience and other retail stores throughout the County. The County printed 500 Isle Be Green reusable bags to distribute at a plastic bag recycling kick-off event on August 5, 2009. This year, citizens were asked to complete a recycling survey at the Isle of Wight County Fair. In exchange for completing the survey, they received an Isle Be Green reusable shopping bag. The County has begun distributing an additional 3,000 Isle Be Green reusable bags and plans to distribute 500 reusable bags to the County's second grade students at Farm Day in May 2010.

Education and outreach to the community

Ringer/rg, a marketing and consulting firm, created a website, www.islebegreen.com, pro bono for the Isle Be Green Plastic Bag Recycling Program. In addition to the website, a Twitter account, www.twitter.com/IsleBeGreen, has been established and has over 300 followers.

The County partnered with Trex and Farm Fresh to create a plastic bag collection competition in all five (5) of the County's elementary schools. The winning school will receive a pizza party for the entire school and a Trex bench for their campus. As part of the kick-off of the competition, the County along with Trex and Farm Fresh representatives attended each of the elementary schools' open houses in September 2009 to share information about the County's Plastic Bag Recycling Program and the recycling competition. To date, the elementary schools have collected 410,529 plastic bags (5,864.7 pounds).

In addition to the plastic bag collection contest at the elementary schools, Isle of Wight has conducted a number of outreach efforts to children in the County by conducting programs at

the Isle of Wight County Fair, the County's libraries and several youth programs specifically addressing plastic bag recycling and the benefits of recycling in general.

In March, the Isle Be Green Program held recycling art workshops for children and adults at the Smithfield Cultural Arts Center with artist Donna Iona Drozda of Virginia Beach. She taught a class centered on creating art from recycled material – in particular plastic bags and cereal boxes. In partnership with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Ms. Drozda will also assist each of the County's elementary schools in creating a plastic bag art animal for each school. The bag animals will be displayed at the Isle of Wight County Fair in September 2010.

PROGRAM COSTS

Isle of Wight County was awarded a \$28,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to implement a pilot plastic bag recycling project within the County. The County also received \$2,000 from the Retail Alliance and an additional \$4,000 from the South Hampton Roads Resource Conservation and Development Council.

The County has also raised \$8,200 in sponsorship dollars to supplement the Program. Since the grant had restrictions on mass media advertising, the sponsorship dollars have been used to offset those costs. The County has received in-kind support in the approximate amount of \$19,000 in addition to some services and other contributions which can not be valued.

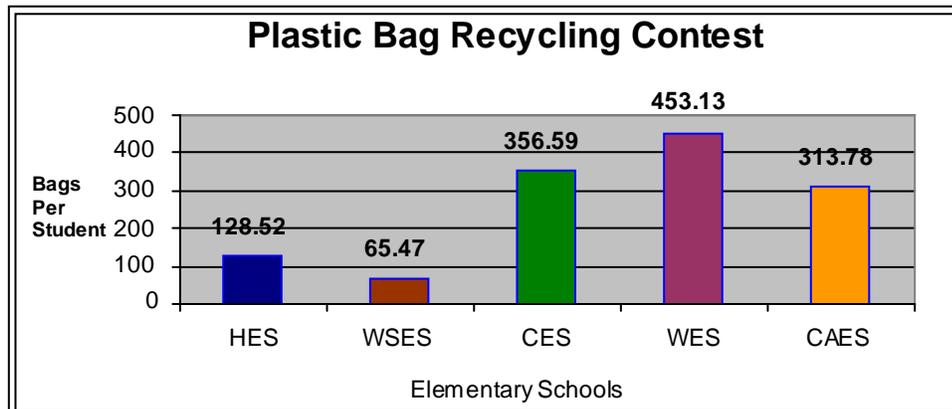
Due to the significant amount of grant and sponsorship funding the Program has received, the actual monetary costs to the County for the Isle Be Green Plastic Bag Recycling Program have been very minimal. The most significant direct cost to the County has been staff time. The Rural Economic Development Manager has allocated a portion of her time to administering and promoting the Program. The County's General Services staff has also invested staff time to collect the bags from the receptacles at the County convenience centers, weigh them and bale them.

The primary non-salary, direct project expenses have been: the purchase of a baler (\$5,500); kick-off event (\$5,886); purchase of reusable bags with Isle Be Green Promotional logo (\$6,725); and flyers, banners and other signage (\$2,900).

RESULTS/SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

As a result of the Isle Be Green Plastic Bag Recycling Program, Isle of Wight is recycling a lot of plastic bags – more than 482,569 bags (6,893 pounds) have been collected for recycling since Isle of Wight kicked-off the recycling effort in August 2009. Due to the plastic recycling effort, the County is reducing its landfill tipping fees and is hopefully reducing the amount of plastic bags littering the environment.

The school competition has been the source of the majority of the plastic collected, far exceeding that of any other collection mechanism. The elementary schools have collected more than 410,529 bags (5,864.7 pounds). Windsor Elementary School has collected an average of 453.13 plastic bags per student.



Plastic Bags Collected per elementary student at the County's 5 elementary schools.

The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Thrift Store has been a tremendous partner in this effort, going above and beyond to assist the County in any way. The Plastic Bag Recycling Program has also been very positive for DAV. After completion of the pilot collection project at the Smithfield Square Shopping Center on November 30, 2009, the DAV Thrift Store began

baling its own plastic at their Smithfield store and their other locations. They are selling the baled plastic bags to the Trex Company, Inc. During the pilot program they realized they are a huge generator of plastic bag material (donations are generally brought to them in plastic bags) and that they could benefit financially by selling the plastic. During the August 2009 – November 2009 timeframe, the Smithfield DAV Thrift Store collected 701.5 pounds of plastic bags (49,105 bags). All of the DAV Thrift Stores now have balers onsite, making it very easy to have the material in the acceptable format for Trex. Before the Isle Be Green Plastic Bag Recycling Program the DAV Thrift Stores were not recycling any of their plastic.

Farm Fresh is also to be commended for its partnership effort. Farm Fresh has done away with most plastic grocery bags in two of their store locations which principally serve Isle of Wight County citizens. Farm Fresh now offers only paper bags during the checkout process in those locations and encourages the use of reusable shopping bags by offering a five cent (\$.05) per bag discount for each reusable shopping bag used by their customers. Additionally, they co-sponsored magic shows (highlighting recycling) for all of the County's elementary schools and serve as the collection point for the elementary school recycled plastic. One identified potential unintended consequence of the school collection competition is that the school children are encouraging their parents to shop at stores which offer plastic (i.e. the County's other two grocery store chains) versus stores that are paper only (i.e. Farm Fresh) so that they can have more plastic to take to school to recycle. The County in no way intended to divert patronage from one retailer to another as a result of this campaign.

The County has now added plastic bag collection bins at all eight (8) of the convenience centers. Data is currently available for only the three (3) original test sites. The three sites have collected more than 14,525 bags (207.5 pounds) of plastic bags. Prior to the Isle Be Green Plastic Bag Recycling Program, the County was not capturing any recycled plastic at its convenience centers.

The County is continually finding new recycling partners as word of the Plastic Bag Recycling Program spreads. Along with their annual food drive, the local Girl Scouts solicited plastic bags. As a result, more than 2,800 bags were collected. Several collection bins have been placed at the County office complex – to date more than 1,410 bags have been collected. Additionally, the Blackwater Regional Library System has placed containers at its three (3) branches in Isle of Wight. Colonial Farm Credit, a local bank, and the Town of Windsor have also requested recycling containers.

WORTHINESS OF AN AWARD

Recognizing that the littering of plastic bags is an environmental hazard and an eyesore, as well as a nuisance and financial burden to County farmers, Isle of Wight has taken a proactive stance to help resolve the situation. Through its Isle Be Green Plastic Bag Recycling Program, Isle of Wight is promoting recycling, diverting plastic bags from the County's refuse stream, and hopefully reducing the amount of plastic littering the environment. Since the Program's inception in August 2009, more than 482,569 bags (6,893 pounds) have been collected for recycling. The County continues to identify additional local partners in its plastic bag recycling endeavor as word spreads about the Program. Additionally, Isle of Wight's efforts have spurred action by the Commonwealth of Virginia on the environmental impacts of the use and disposal of plastic bags.