

Despite tight landfill space, mattress recycling bill failed

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ANNAPOLIS

Despite tight landfill space, mattress recycling bill failed



The Maryland State House. (Photo by Julie Depenbrock/Capital News Service)
BY JARED BEINART - APRIL 19, 2019
307 VIEWS

ANNAPOLIS, Maryland — “End-of-life” mattresses and box springs are often discarded in landfills or illegally dumped — this remains an issue for Maryland’s environmental waste management goals and the state’s landfill lifespan.

These products, which are often bulky and difficult to move, are one of the factors causing the depletion of available space in Maryland landfills, according to bill sponsor Delegate Terri Hill, D-Baltimore and Howard counties.

The growing population and corresponding amount of solid waste are among reasons why the Department of Legislative Services’ reported that the state’s landfill space has a remaining lifespan of about 31 years, according to the 2017 Solid Waste Management and Recycling in Maryland report. (<http://dls.maryland.gov/pubs/prod/NatRes/January-2017-Waste-Management-in-Maryland.pdf>)

Hill’s legislation, which would have helped address depleting landfill space and illegal disposal, did not advance through both chambers this session and will not become a law this year.

House bill 502 encouraged Maryland jurisdictions to consider other states’ models for mattress and box spring recycling as inspiration for the development of their own programs, according to Hill. The bill passed the House but failed to advance in the Senate this session.

According to written testimony from Jeffrey Fretwell, director of legislative and intergovernmental relations for the Maryland Department of the Environment, a lack of available resources can result in the illegal dumping of mattresses as they are often difficult to collect and transport.

Some jurisdictions in Maryland provide bulk pickup services that allow residents to schedule an appointment for collection, or go directly to the landfills themselves, or pay for private disposal.

Bulk pickup services vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, as some counties do not offer these collection services, while some will provide the service for a fee, and others will collect the items for free, according to each counties' distinctive bulk pickup regulations.

Fretwell added that illegal dumping places a burden on local communities as they often bear the costs for cleanup and disposal.

Certain counties and cities in Maryland charge to pick up and dispose of mattresses and box springs, which further inspires illegal dumping, according to Fretwell.

The state's current environmental sustainability plan — the Waste Reduction and Resource Recovery executive order put in place by Gov. Larry Hogan, R, in 2017 — does not address the management of “end-of-life” mattresses and box springs, according to Hill.

Hill pointed out during a Senate bill hearing on Feb. 26 that Ocean City, Maryland, has about 25,000 condominium rooms and 10,000 hotel rooms, which change their mattresses every 5-7 years.

“That’s a lot of mattresses,” Hill said. “When mattresses disappear they end up in landfills or the side of the road. Mattresses are not included in any of our waste stream plans.”

The Ocean City Hotel, Motel and Restaurant Association says that it is left up to the individual owners of the hotels and condominiums to determine when to dispose of their mattresses.

Typically high-end mattresses have an average lifespan seven years, according to a report from Tuck, an organization that collects data and information on sleep products.

More than 50,000 mattresses are discarded daily in landfills across the country, according to the Mattress Recycling Council, a non-profit dedicated to the development and implementation of statewide programs in California, Connecticut and Rhode Island.

The Maryland Department of the Environment would have provided local communities with program options and ways to properly and legally approach mattress waste management under Hill's proposed legislation, according to the bill's analysis.

The new legislation aimed to extend the life and capacity of Maryland landfills, as well as create job opportunities and boost local economies.

In her testimony, Hill stated that the programs created and adopted under the bill would be based on the models of two nationally recognized mattress "end-of-life" recycling programs: St. Vincent de Paul Society and Spring Back Recycling.

The former is a program based in Eugene, Oregon, and is one of the largest commercially viable mattress repurposing services in the world, according to Hill.

The program recycles more than 300,000 mattresses and box springs every year, diverting 17.8 million pounds from landfills in California and Oregon, according to Hill's presentation.

This proposed legislation would have encouraged the state's jurisdictions to follow St. Vincent de Paul Society's model of component deconstruction, which breaks down mattresses by separating various items — including fiber, foam, wood and steel — and then ships them out for recycling purposes.

“While (these products) are bulky and often hard to collect, they contain a slew of (recyclable) materials,” Director of Policy and Advocacy for the National Waste and Recycling Association and board member of the Maryland Recycling Network Chaz Miller said.

The steel from mattress springs can be melted and recycled into various products; foam can be processed into carpet underlay; wood can be used to create mulch; and fiber found within mattresses can be reprocessed and used to create filters for industrial equipment, according to Hill.

Eighty-five to 90 percent of mattress material can be recycled when broken down, according to Divert Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, DR3, a California subsidiary of the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County.

Programs established by organizations like the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County, Oregon, and DR3, provide job opportunities and training for more than 84,000 ex-offenders, homeless and at-risk individuals, according to Hill’s presentation.

Spring Back Recycling, which has locations in Colorado, Tennessee, Washington and Utah, is another program that processes hundreds of mattresses every week, according to Hill’s testimony.

In 2017, the state had a recycling rate of 45 percent of all solid waste generated that year, according to the Maryland Department of the Environment.

Kevin Daly, president of TurboHaul, told Capital News Service that he supported the legislation’s effort to improve the availability and creation of mattress recycling programs in the state, as it would encourage and educate residents to consider better waste management habits.

TurboHaul, based in Jessup, Maryland, runs a mattress and box spring recycling program that processes about 300 units per week within the state, according to Daly.

Daly said they bring old mattresses to their facility where they are deconstructed, then parts are sent to recycling centers.

“Our goal is to be able to handle the mattress and box-spring recycling needs for anyone in the state,” Daly said. “... Helping meet the goals of the (Maryland Recycling Act), helping the environment and creating jobs for disadvantaged individuals.”

Since 2016, Hill has introduced similar legislation each session encouraging improved mattress recycling practices within the state, however, none of the bills have made successfully passed both chambers.

A representative from the office of Hill confirmed that the lawmaker will continue to pursue this issue in future sessions stating the recycling initiative will have “obvious wins for the environment,” in addition to funding opportunities for non-profits and creating new jobs.

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