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Mattress Recycling Law On Track to Pass

By TIM FAULKNER/ecoRI News staff

PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island is poised to become the second state to adopt a mattress recycling law. Last month, the Connecticut Legislature passed the nation's first mattress disposal program.

The Rhode Island bill (S621), endorsed June 12 by the Senate Committee on the Environment and Agriculture, is modeled after Connecticut's. The producer-responsibility program brings together manufacturers and retailers to collect and properly dismantle old mattresses and box springs, which are 95 percent recyclable.



Sen. Dominick Ruggerio speaks about his mattress recycling bill during a June 12 committee hearing. (Tim Faulkner/ecoRI news)

The program receives funding through a yet-to-be-determined fee paid by consumers at the point of purchase.

It didn't take long for the bill to get the green light during its second committee hearing. The bill's sponsor, Senate Majority Leader Dominick Ruggerio, D-North Providence, noted that the legislation was two years in the making but has added urgency this year as a mattress processor is likely to relocate to Rhode Island if the bill becomes law.

The program would establish mattress drop-off sites at municipal transfer stations and collection at retailers. The bill doesn't require retailers and municipalities to participate, but they must have an alternate mattress recycling program in place.

The Connecticut law begins in 2014. The Rhode Island law would start 18 months after it is approved. A mattress stewardship council would set the rules and cost for the program, with manufacturers and retailers. The Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation would oversee the program.

The bill is expected to pass the full Senate on June 19. If passed, it would move to the House for a hearing.

Much of the push for proper mattress recycling comes from cities and towns that are saddled with the expensive cost of collecting and disposing of discarded mattress. Donna Kaehler, recycling coordinator for North Smithfield, said her town paid to dispose of 350 mattress and box springs, weighing 9 nine tons, last year.

"We're doing the right environmental thing but it is very costly," she said.

Sarah Kite, director of recycling services for the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, said the Central Landfill takes in about 70,000 mattresses annually. Foam, metal, wood and other parts can be salvaged, but cities and towns currently pay for the work. Three companies in the mattress disposal industry want to relocate to the state if the program is established, she said.

The bill was endorsed by the mattress industry group, the International Sleep Products Association. The group opposed the legislation in previous years. "The industry is taking responsibility for the products they put out," said Jeff Taylor, a lobbyist for the group.

The Rhode Island Hospitality Association industry opposes the bill due to concerns it would make mattresses more expensive. Many hotels already pay to properly dispose of old mattresses, said the group's lobbyist, Terrance Martiesian. "We have recycling already."

The bill passed, 9-0.

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The mattress program would be the third producer-responsibility program passed in three years by the General Assembly. A used paint can collection program was instituted in 2012. In 2011, a collection program was launched for collecting thermostats containing mercury. The producer-responsibility programs have been a collaborative effort with the Product Stewardship Institute, the state Department of Environmental Management, Clean Water Action and other environmental groups. Medical sharps, light bulbs and product packaging are also actively being considered for product stewardship programs.

In addition to Rhode Island and Connecticut, California also is expected to pass a mattress recycling program.