

O'Malley praises Coca-Cola, state 'Green Registry'

Governor backs state list, bottler's efforts at recycling

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Gov. Martin O'Malley stopped by a Coca-Cola bottling plant in East Baltimore on Wednesday - not for a drink, but to promote the company's environmental efforts and urge more Maryland businesses to jump onto the green bandwagon.

After touring the plant and trying his hand at crushing a batch of aluminum cans for recycling, the governor praised Coca-Cola Enterprises, a distribution arm of the giant beverage company, for its efforts to reduce its waste, energy and water use.

And he used his visit to plug his administration's "Maryland Green Registry," a self-nominating who's-who of businesses, universities and government agencies seeking recognition for voluntarily recycling waste and reducing energy use or pollution.

"There's so many corporations doing so many good things," O'Malley said. While environmental regulations have their place in reducing pollution, he said, it's also important to encourage businesses to adopt more sustainable practices through voluntary programs like the registry.

State officials say nearly 80 businesses and organizations have joined the registry since its formation in June - though the registry's [Web site](#) lists 66. Companies can get listed by checking off that they're doing at least five things to reduce their energy use or environmental impact, and by agreeing to share details of at least one of their efforts with other companies.

It doesn't take much to get listed. Companies can get at least partial credit for simply having an environmental plan and goals, and they are not required to submit proof of their environmental claims. Nor are pollution violations a bar: Constellation Energy, which was fined \$1 million two years ago for contaminating homeowners' wells in Gambrills, is on the registry.

Laura Armstrong, pollution prevention and sustainability coordinator for the Maryland Department of the Environment, said the registry is meant to recognize and encourage good corporate environmental behavior, regardless of violations.

While companies are on the "honor system" to be truthful about their efforts, she maintained that the registry is transparent, since the claims are public and can be checked by consumers and competitors. Nor is the listing any official state endorsement of a company's performance, she stressed.

"I don't think we're holding out the Green Registry to be anything more than it is," she said.



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An Annapolis restaurant, Punk's Backyard Grill, thought enough of getting onto the registry to put out a news release this week proclaiming it the first restaurant in Maryland to get an "official green certification" from the state.

Even so, Joel Makower, executive editor of GreenBiz.com, called the Maryland registry a "great resource" and a model for helping businesses improve their environmental performance.

"For all the talk about 'going green,' " he wrote in an email, "there are precious few resources to help companies, especially smaller ones, understand what exactly to do, and where to find local resources."

Brad Heavner, state director of Environment Maryland, was more guarded, but also praised it. "It's not revolutionary, but ... you need to encourage innovation," he said.

"If companies are bad actors, we need to make that known," Heavner added. "If they're good actors, we need to know that, too. As long as you don't sweep the bad stuff under the carpet, it's not total green-washing."

Of the companies on the registry, Coca-Cola Enterprises stands out as one of the largest and one independently recognized for its efforts to reduce its environmental impact. Newsweek recently ranked the Atlanta-based drink maker among the nation's greenest companies.

Company officials explained how the Baltimore plant is now recycling 93 percent of the cans, bottles and packaging waste it once threw away. It also is working to waste less of the city water it consumes for making its drinks, and has replaced about a fourth of its delivery trucks with hybrid diesel-electric vehicles.

The registry also includes smaller companies, such as British American Auto Care, a Columbia repair shop that offers what it touts as "green car care." Co-owner Brian England said the business has cut its energy costs by switching lights and even removing some, and plans to install a skylight. "Protecting the environment makes sense," he said. "It makes sense for big businesses like [Coca-Cola], and it makes sense for the tiniest of businesses."

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