

## Calif. bill seeks to ban plastic shopping bags

ROBIN HINDERY - Associated Press Writer - Associated Press

Using plastic shopping bags could join indoor smoking and behind-the-wheel texting as the latest discouraged activity in California if lawmakers succeed in passing the country's first statewide ban on disposable bags.

The state Senate is scheduled to vote Tuesday on the bill, which has been the subject of a furious lobbying campaign by the plastic bag manufacturing industry. It calls the legislation a job killer.

Supporters of AB1998 say the 19 billion plastic bags Californians use every year harm the environment and cost the state \$25 million annually to collect and transport to landfills.

"California is poised to lead a national movement against plastic bag pollution that is injuring and killing marine life and imposing a costly blight on our land," said the bill's author, Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica.

The ban, if eventually signed into law, would take effect in supermarkets and large retail stores in 2012. It would apply to smaller stores in 2013.

In the days leading to Tuesday's vote, Brownley amended the bill in an effort to gain more support. Most significantly, she removed a provision that would have imposed a 5-cent fee for customers who forget to bring their own bag and need to buy a recycled paper one. The proceeds would have gone entirely to the retailer.

Under the revised bill, retailers would be allowed to charge only what it costs them to buy paper bags. Stores would be required to provide free bags to shoppers who rely on government assistance.

The amended bill also designates \$2 million from an existing recycling-promotion fund to be used to help manufacturers modify their plants to produce reusable plastic bags using recycled content. A state law that took effect in 2007 requires supermarkets and other large retailers to place plastic bag recycling bins in easily accessible locations and have reusable bags available for customers to buy.

Critics say the \$2 million is not enough to protect California manufacturing jobs and that the state should focus on enhancing recycling programs to reduce bag litter.

The bill's main opponent, the Virginia-based American Chemistry Council, has spent millions in lobbying fees, radio ads and even a prime-time television ad attacking the measure. The organization represents plastic bag manufacturers such as Dow Chemical Co. and ExxonMobil Corp.

Last year, it helped defeat an effort by Seattle to impose a 20-cent fee on the use of

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plastic or paper grocery bags.

"Lawmakers should be working on real problems, not wasting their time on legislation to tell us how to bag our own groceries," the group says on a website devoted to AB1998, [StopTheBagPolice.com](http://StopTheBagPolice.com).

Brownley described her fight with the American Chemistry Council as "a David and Goliath battle," but said she remained confident she would prevail.

Discouraging plastic bag use through fees or bans first gained traction outside of the U.S. in nations such as South Africa, Ireland, China and Bangladesh.

In 2007, San Francisco became the first American city to require supermarkets and large drug stores to offer customers bags made only of recyclable paper, plastic that can be turned into compost, or sturdy cloth or plastic that can be reused.

The cities of Palo Alto, Malibu and Fairfax have since followed, while a ban approved in Manhattan Beach is tied up in litigation, said Matthew King, a spokesman for Heal the Bay, the Santa Monica-based nonprofit that sponsored AB1998.

In January, Washington, D.C., implemented a 5-cent surcharge on disposable paper and plastic bags.

If AB1998 passes the Senate on Tuesday, the Assembly would have to approve amendments before sending it to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's desk.

After the Assembly passed an earlier version of the measure in June, the Republican governor issued a statement saying he supported a ban on plastic bags in California. However, he has not committed to signing the bill in its current form.

If the measure is defeated, either by the Legislature or a Schwarzenegger veto, some local government officials are ready to take matters into their own hands. According to Heal the Bay, officials in Los Angeles County, Redondo Beach and Santa Monica said they would pursue individual city- and countywide bans in the coming months.

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