Governor Rejects Plastic Bag Recycling Bill

CHICAGO (AP) — Gov. Pat Quinn vetoed a bill Sunday that would have required plastic bag manufacturers to set up collection and recycling programs, calling it a "roadblock" for local communities to make their own choices.

The proposed law says manufacturers must set up recycling programs with the goal of increasing the recycling rate by 12 percent by 2015 and to eventually make bags from at least 30 percent recycled content. It also would have required manufacturers to register with Illinois officials, as retail stores would have been able to use bags only from registered manufacturers. And local municipalities would have been prohibited from enacting their own plastic bag laws, including bans.

Environmentalists, including a young teenager who led a petition drive against it, did not support the bill. They claimed that the goals set by the law were minimal and that local communities could do more by passing their own laws. Plastic bag manufacturers and the Illinois Retail Merchants Association supported the bill.

Quinn, a Chicago Democrat, said he wanted to work on a better plan to increase recycling efforts.

"Let's not tie the hands of innovative Illinois municipalities that are laboratories of reform for Illinois," Quinn said in a statement. "While well-intentioned, this legislation is a roadblock to innovation that would do little to boost recycling in Illinois. We can do better."

Dozens of cities nationwide have banned plastic bags, including Los Angeles and Seattle. Some municipalities fine customers who use them because of concerns over petroleum products, littering and animals becoming tangled in or swallowing them. In Illinois, Champaign had been considering a fee or ban on plastic bags.

Manufacturers said they were disappointed in Quinn's decision. Lawmakers could still vote to override Quinn's veto.

Mark Denzler, vice president of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association, said in a statement that the law "represented an opportunity for Illinois to lead the nation in recycling plastic bags and plastic film that account for a major part of the waste stream."

He said that without a statewide regulation manufacturers and retailers would face a "confusing and costly patchwork of regulations across the state."

Meanwhile, 13-year-old Abby Goldberg of suburban Chicago celebrated the decision. She led a petition drive against the bill with some 170,000 signatures and has pushed for her hometown of Grayslake to ban them.

"I couldn't sit by quietly while big plastic tried to push this bill through my state," Goldberg said in a statement. "I care too much about animals, our environment, and our future natural resources to be silent. That's why I took action."

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