

# The Basics on Plastic Grocery and Retail Bag Source Reduction and Recycling Opportunities

California is experiencing an expansion of plastic film diversion opportunities and programs for local government, industry, businesses, environmental stakeholders, and the general public. Recently passed legislation, AB2449, which requires implementation of a statewide plastic bag recycling program effective July 1, 2007. Californians can help reduce the number of plastic bags that litter the California landscape, roadways, waterways and landfills by remembering to take reusable bags with them on shopping excursions and recycling any plastic grocery or retail bags.

## Quick Facts

Plastic bags are made out of "film", or thin flexible sheets of plastic. Most plastic bags are made from polyethylene resin code #2 or #4. Resin code #2 is high density polyethylene (HDPE). Resin code #4 is either low density polyethylene (LDPE) or linear low density polyethylene (LLDPE). Plastics bags made of either type of resin can be readily recycled if the material is clean, dry, and not dark in color. If no resin code is printed on the film or plastic bag, the film's application may indicate the resin type since different resins are chosen for their unique performance. Most grocery and retail bags are made from HDPE. Newspaper bags and dry cleaning bags are made of LDPE or LLDPE. Stretch wrap, which is used by retailers for shipping purposes, is made of LLDPE. This allows for commingling of these various types of film plastics for recycling opportunities. According to the Progressive Bag Alliance (PBA), California retailers distribute more than 19 billion plastic retail carry out bags annually. Less than 5% are currently recycled. At-store plastic bag recycling programs can help provide California consumers with a convenient network of more than 7,000 locations for bag recycling.

## New Legislation

With the enactment of Chapter 845, Statutes of 2006 (Levine, AB 2449), grocery and retail stores, as defined, are required to provide drop-off recycling service for grocery and merchandise bags. The intent of the bill is to create a six year pilot statewide plastic bag recycling program. The bill will require grocery stores that meet the definition of a supermarket and retail establishments with over 10,000 sq ft of retail space that have licensed pharmacies on premises to set up an at-store recycling program for customers. The basic requirements include:

- Plastic carryout bags provided by the store shall have printed or displayed on the bag, in a manner visible to a consumer, the words "PLEASE RETURN TO A PARTICIPATING STORE FOR RECYCLING."
- The store is to provide a collection bin and promotion materials, placed in a visible area which is easily accessible to the consumer, and clearly marked identifying the collection bin is for the purpose of collecting and recycling plastic carryout bags.
- All plastic bags gathered by the store shall be collected, transported, and recycled in a manner that does not conflict with the City's source reduction and recycling element.
- The store shall maintain records describing the collection, transport, and recycling of plastic bags for a minimum of three years and shall make the records available to the City or Board to demonstrate compliance.
- The store must offer reusable bags to customers, for purchase or at no-charge.



The bill also requires plastic carryout bag manufacturers to develop educational materials to encourage the reducing, reusing, and recycling of plastic bags and make those educational materials available to retail stores. More information on the bill and its history go to: [http://www.cawrecycles.org/issues/current\\_legislation/ab2449\\_06](http://www.cawrecycles.org/issues/current_legislation/ab2449_06).

## Tools for Grocery/Retail Stores and Municipalities

The Progressive Bag Alliance (PBA), at <http://www.progressivebagalliance.com/>, is working with policy makers, businesses, and community members to implement new ideas and improve existing programs that make a difference; helping to ensure that plastic bags are recycled, reused, and disposed of properly. The website provides grocers, retailers and municipalities in California with resources to help implement at store plastic bag recycling programs and curbside film diversion programs.

PBA has developed a toolkit to help make it easier for retailers of all sizes to implement at-store plastic bag recycling programs and facilitate the recovery of clean, dry grocery and retail carryout bags, as well as other polyethylene films. The toolkit provides retailers with a step-by-step process to implement an at-store plastic bag recycling program including: instructions on setting up collections bins, signage, bag consolidation, sale of material and consumer education. The tool kit can be downloaded for free at <http://www.progressivebagalliance.com/at-store-toolkit.html>

Additionally, to help implement curbside film diversion programs, PBA developed a toolkit for curbside collection programs, including templates for press releases, print ads, logos, PSAs, and bill stuffers. The tool kit can be downloaded for free at <http://www.progressivebagalliance.com/toolkit.html>. For more information, please contact PBA at info@progressivebagalliance.com or 1-866-432-0941.

## Resources for Consumers, Businesses and Municipalities

The American Chemistry Council and Moore Recycling Associates have developed a website to facilitate the recovery of clean dry grocery and retail bags and polyethylene film such as stretch wrap and shrink wrap. The web site provides consumers, municipalities and businesses in California an opportunity to identify grocery stores and other recovery facility locations that collect plastic bags and film for recycling. Additional highlights of the web site include a film identification section, information on how to set up a collection program, a markets database, and tools to determine the cost-effectiveness of an onsite plastic film recovery program. Visit the website at <http://www.plasticbagrecycling.org/> For more information contact Moore Recycling Associates at 888/753-7485 [Help@plasticbagrecycling.org](mailto:Help@plasticbagrecycling.org).

The California Integrated Waste Management Board (CIWMB) provides information, fact sheets, and assistance on the implementation of AB 2449 for municipalities and businesses through its Office of Local Assistance. For more information use the following link: <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/LGCentral/Basics/PlasticBag.htm> or contact the Office of Local Assistance staff through <http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/OLA/Contacts.asp>

**For more information or assistance with implementing recycling programs contact the staff of Keep California Beautiful.**

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