

## Lawmaker urges 25-cent fee for plastic grocery bags

By Troy Anderson, Staff Writer

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California would have the nation's toughest plastic-bag law - requiring all large grocery stores and pharmacies to charge customers 25cents per bag - under a bill sponsored and endorsed Thursday by Los Angeles County government.

AB 2829, authored by Assemblyman Mike Davis, D-Los Angeles, would mark the most aggressive action by any state to curb the use of plastic bags and limit their impact on the ocean, wildlife and environment.

"This statewide fee would be the toughest statewide policy we've seen to date," said Kirsten James, water quality director at Heal the Bay.

"We've seen a lot of momentum on plastic bags. Communities are starting to realize it is a big problem. Economically, cities are spending millions of dollars to clean up litter such as plastic bags."

The bill would amend a state law, AB 2449, that currently forbids cities and counties from imposing fees for carryout bags.

The money raised by the fee would be used by local governments for litter prevention and reduction efforts.

But Keith Christman, senior director of packaging for Progressive Bag Affiliates of the American Chemistry Council, said state lawmakers should wait to see how the current state law - which calls for plastic-bag recycling - works out before passing another bill.

"I don't think the public will pay 25 cents a bag," Christman said. "Grocery stores will start handing out paper bags. They will go back to paper bags. Paper bags require 40 (percent to) 70percent more energy, double

greenhouse-gas emissions, increase waste by 80 percent and dramatically increase water use."

The Assembly Natural Resource Committee will vote Monday on the bill.

The bill comes as environmental groups have argued that plastic bags endanger wildlife, pollute waterways, exacerbate neighborhood blight and generate thousands of tons of unnecessary waste.

In January, the Board of Supervisors voted to require large grocery stores and retail stores in unincorporated areas to significantly reduce the use of plastic bags or face a ban in 2013.

But after the supervisors approved the plan, some board members expressed concern about how many businesses in unincorporated areas would actually be affected and directed officials to draft a list.

County officials plan to present the list to the supervisors in June.

"The distribution of plastic bags has created a hidden cost on residents," Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke said. "They not only pay for plastic bags in the price of their commodities, but their tax dollars fund litter-prevention and -abatement efforts."

"It's our poorest communities that are most negatively impacted by the high amount of plastic-bag blight."

Each year, Californians use more than 19billion plastic bags, including 6billion in Los Angeles County.

Taxpayers spend more than \$25 million to collect and dispose of them. While the bags are recyclable, less than 5percent are actually recycled. Most end up in landfills, clogging waterways or blowing in the streets.

State legislation passed last year requires retailers to sell reusable totes at store entrances to encourage people to reduce the use of both plastic and paper bags.

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