

## Greenspace

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS FROM CALIFORNIA AND BEYOND

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### California poised to ban plastic bags

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Legislation that would ban many California stores from giving away single-use plastic bags has taken a step closer to becoming law. AB 1998 was passed by the Assembly Appropriations Committee on Friday and will be voted upon next Friday by the full Assembly. If passed and signed by the governor, the law would go into effect Jan. 1, 2012.

Each year, Californians use 19 billion plastic bags, only 5% of which are recycled, according

to the California Integrated Waste Management Board. The average California resident uses 600 plastic bags per year.

"This legislation starts breaking our addiction to single-use plastic packaging, which has gotten completely out of control," said Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay, a Santa Monica-based environmental group supporting AB 1998.

"We've been pushing on this a really long time -- for six years through four different legislative vehicles," said Gold, adding that previous efforts to reduce plastic bag use by charging customers a per-bag fee had failed to garner support, especially in a down economy. "Hopefully, persistence will pay off for the oceans."

Over the past couple of years, numerous California cities have proposed plastic-bag bans; five cities have passed them, including Malibu and San Francisco.

Uniformity is the main reason the California Grocers Assn. is supporting the bill.

"There have been a number of different proposals and different cities have approached this in different ways," said Dave Heylen, spokesman for the California Grocers Assn. in Sacramento, a group that represents 500 retail grocery companies that operate 8,000 stores in California. "This bill would impact supermarkets, chain pharmacies, local neighborhood markets, convenience stores and liquor stores, so this bill provides a uniform statewide standard to help level the playing field among food retailers."

Heylen added that a ban on single-use, carry-out bags bring the most environmental gain with the least competitive disruption for retailers.

"We think this could be historic legislation that is a model for other states to follow," said Gina Goodhill, oceans advocate for the L.A.-based environmental group, Environment California.

-- Susan Carpenter

*Photo credit: Heal the Bay*