

Calif. Moves To Ban Plastic Bags At Grocery Stores

by THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Associated Press

A car drives past a plastic bag lying on a on-ramp to Highway 70 near Olivehurs, Calif., Wednesday, June 2, 2010. The California Assembly on Wednesday passed legislation that would prohibit grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores and convenience stores from giving out free plastic and paper bags. If signed into law, California would be the first state to impose such a ban.



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A customer walks into a grocery store in front of an advertising using cloth bags in Palo Alto, Calif., Wednesday, June 2, 2010. It could soon cost California shoppers at the checkout if they forget to bring their own bag to the grocery store under what would be the nation's first statewide plastic bag ban. The California Assembly on Wednesday passed legislation that would prohibit grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores and convenience stores from giving out free plastic and paper bags. If signed into law, California would be the first state to impose such a ban.

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It could soon cost California shoppers at the checkout aisle if they forget to bring their own bags to the store under what would be the nation's first statewide plastic bag ban.

The California Assembly on Wednesday passed legislation prohibiting pharmacies and grocery, liquor and convenience stores from giving out plastic bags. The bill also calls for customers to be charged for using store-issued paper bags.

The goal is to get rid of unsightly disposable plastic bags that often wind up in urban rivers and the ocean, as well as to reduce the number of bags heading for landfills.

"The biggest way to eliminate this kind of pollution is to ban it," said Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, who authored the bill.

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 U.S. 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.

[Wal-Mart Stores Inc.](#) got rid of plastic bags at three of its Northern California stores this January as part of a pilot program to gauge customer response.

No other U.S. state has adopted a ban, according to Brownley's office.

The bill, AB 1998, still needs state Senate approval. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger praised the Assembly for passing the plastic bag ban, which he called "a great victory for our environment."



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A customer puts plastics bags in a recycling can at a grocery store in Palo Alto, Calif., Wednesday, June 2, 2010. It could soon cost California shoppers at the checkout if they forget to bring their own bag to the grocery store under what would be the nation's first statewide plastic bag ban. The California Assembly on Wednesday passed legislation that would prohibit grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores and convenience stores from giving out free plastic and paper bags. If signed into law, California would be the first state to impose such a ban.



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Grocery store clerk Mike Saladino places a customer's purchased items in a paper bag in Palo Alto, Calif., Wednesday, June 2, 2010. It could soon cost California shoppers at the checkout if they forget to bring their own bag to the grocery store under what would be the nation's first statewide plastic bag ban. The California Assembly on Wednesday passed legislation that would prohibit grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores and convenience stores from giving out free plastic and paper bags. If signed into law, California would be the first state to impose such a ban.



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Grocery store clerk Mike Saladino hands a customer her purchased items in her cloth bag in Palo Alto, Calif. Wednesday, June 2, 2010. It could soon cost California shoppers at the checkout if they forget to bring their own bag to the grocery store under what would be the nation's first statewide plastic bag ban. The California Assembly on Wednesday passed legislation that would prohibit grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores and convenience stores from giving out free plastic and paper bags. If signed into law, California would be the first state to impose such a ban.

Ashley Smith, 29, of Sacramento said she favors banning plastic bags, even though she reuses her plastic bags to pick up after her dog.

It's good to do things that are good for the environment," Smith said as she left a Safeway grocery store in Sacramento.

Requiring stores to charge customers for paper bags is a cost Republican lawmakers argued some Californians can't afford.

"This is not the time to be putting a financial burden on families in a very tough economy," said Assemblyman Ted Gaines, R-Granite Bay, who estimated his family would spend \$50 a year on paper bags.

The American Chemistry Council estimates the bill would amount to a \$1 billion tax and threaten 500 jobs in the plastic bag manufacturing business.

The measure has the support of the California Grocers Association, which decided to back the bill after Brownley agreed to subject all stores that sell groceries to the ban.

It also gives grocery stores one set of rules to follow rather than a patchwork of local ordinances, said Dave Heylen, spokesman for the association.

"As more and more cities started looking at this, each one would tweak it one way or another and that was extremely difficult for those retailers who have stores in multiple cities and counties," Heylen said.

The bill would require stores to sell reusable bags beginning Jan. 1, 2012. Stores could charge no less than 5 cents for recycled paper bags if customers don't have their own bag.

Sacramento shopper Brett Akacin, 37, said he recycles his plastic bags and that it would be a burden to carry a disposable bag. California grocery stores are required under current law to collect used plastic bags that customers return to the store to recycle.

"It's a hassle. I don't want to carry my own bag all the time with me. I go into the store randomly, and I don't like to pay extra for a bag," said Akacin, who had two bags of groceries. "I think it's the store's responsibility."

Associated Press Writers Judy Lin and Robin Hindery in Sacramento and Lisa Leff in San Francisco contributed to this report.

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