
American Samoa law to ban plastic bags next year

(AP) – 13 hours ago



PAGO PAGO, American Samoa — American Samoa is going to make it illegal for stores to hand out plastic bags once a new law goes into effect early next year.

Gov. Togiola Tulafono, who signed the ban into law last week, said the measure would help preserve the environment for future generations.

"I believe this bill ... is a step in the right direction toward protecting the natural beauty of our islands and our native land and sea creatures," Tulafono said in a letter to the territorial Legislature.

The bill says plastic bags litter the landscape, fill streams and pollute the ocean. Advocates say marine animals can become entangled in the bags, which take 500 to 1,000 years to decompose.

The law takes effect Feb. 23. It exempts shopping bags produced entirely from non-petroleum based biodegradable plastic and compostable plastic bags.

Territorial Rep. Taotasi Archie Soliai pushed for the ban for four years. He said the territory needs to protect its limited natural resources.

"This is a step in the right direction for the territory, and I am ecstatically happy that this bill has been signed into law," Soliai said.

Local businessman David Robinson, a strong advocate of the bill, said any increased costs to businesses would be a "small price to pay" for a cleaner environment in the long term.

The territory's Environmental Protection Agency will be responsible for enforcing the law.

California lawmakers on Tuesday rejected a bill seeking to ban plastic shopping bags after a debating whether the state was going too far in trying to regulate personal choice.

A handful of California cities, meanwhile, already ban single-use plastic bags, after San Francisco became the first to do so in 2007.

In January, Washington, D.C., implemented a 5-cent surcharge on disposable paper and plastic bags, and Hawaii's Maui and Kauai counties both enacted bans on plastic bags due to take effect on Jan. 11.

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.

Copyright © 2010 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.