

REUSE AND RECYCLING PROGRAM STARTS JULY 1, 2007

New law will require stores to promote bag reuse and takeback bags for recycling

IN BRIEF

Starting July 1, 2007, large grocery stores and pharmacies will be required to take back plastic bags for recycling and encourage reuse. This new law is the result of last year's AB 2449 by Assembly Member Lloyd Levine. This program is designed to create a uniform, state-wide recycling program for a material that has historically had a very low recycling rate (below 5%) and that is a large component of litter and marine debris.

THE ISSUE

It is estimated that California retailers distribute **19 billion plastic bags annually**. The vast majority of these bags are landfilled, which creates difficulties for local governments who are attempting to meet a state-mandated 50% landfill diversion rate. It costs local agencies and ratepayers more than **\$25 million annually** to manage discarded plastic bags and wraps.

Providing a convenient way for consumers to dispose of plastic bags in an environmentally responsible way may cut down on the volume of bags being littered. Plastic bag litter is quite costly for local governments, who are mandated to clean it up. Southern California cities have spent in excess of \$1.7 billion in meeting Total Maximum Daily Loads for trashed in impaired waterways.

Plastic bags are a menace to our environment and local government waste diversion goals. Almost all of the **600 plastic bags per second** used in California are discarded. Once discarded, they either enter our landfills or our marine environment. People think of plastic bags as being free; instead, they actually cost taxpayers millions every year. San Francisco alone spends an estimated \$8.5 million annually to deal with plastic bag litter.

Plastic bags exact a cost on our marine environment as well. We have all seen plastic bags in transit to our rivers and oceans—trapped in

trees or in storm gutter drains—but it is less often that we see the full environmental affects of plastic bags.

Additionally:

- At least 267 species have been scientifically documented to be adversely affected by plastic marine debris and it is estimated to kill over 100,000 marine mammals and turtles each year.
- Plastic bags are considered especially dangerous to sea turtles, who mistake them for jellyfish, a main food source.
- Currently, 86% of all known species of sea turtles have had reported problems of entanglement or ingestion of marine debris.
- All plastic products that enter our marine environment eventually break down into small fragments, which in some areas of the ocean outweigh plankton by a factor of six and are inextricably altering the marine ecosystem.
- An analysis by the City of Los Angeles found plastic bags and film represent 45% of the litter in the Los Angeles River.

WHAT THE PROGRAM DOES

On top of requiring stores to provide for the recycling of plastic bags, the new state program also requires stores to make **Reusable Bags** available to consumers for purchase. Thanks to this new program, starting July 1 consumers will have a myriad of environmentally-friendly bagging opportunities which should prevent vast quantities of materials being landfilled and further educate the public about the need to reduce, reuse and recycle California's resources.

The program will affect up to 7,000 retailers.