

Waste Legislation

## California Passes Three Landmark Environmental Bills

California passed significant environmental legislation, including a groundbreaking food date labeling bill, a textiles recovery bill, and a full ban on plastic bags at retail checkouts. These bills, now awaiting the governor's approval, represent a major step forward in reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions, while also offering practical solutions for consumers.



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September 4, 2024

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The final days of August were a big win for landmark California environmental bills that have long been in the works. They include a food date label bill, a textiles recovery bill—both “firsts” in the nation— and a full-out ban on plastic bags at retail checkout. All three pieces of legislation now sit on the governor’s desk awaiting anticipated approval.

### **SB 1053 Plastic Bags Ban**

The 2024 law updates a 2014 ban on plastic bags at point of sale. The original bill outlawed low-density polyethylene bags but allowed thicker plastic ones. SB 1053 bans plastic bags in stores, period, allowing only paper at checkout, with a fee attached.

The rationale for the initial exemption on thicker bags was that they were reusable. But stats soon emerged suggesting otherwise. After the 2014 law passed, the number of plastic bags sent to landfills dropped significantly, but over time it was clear that plastic trash by weight had jumped.

The bill did not come to fruition without a fight. The plastics industry spent millions on aggressive ads aimed at stopping the ban and got a referendum on the ballot trying to repeal it once it passed, though lost the battle.

Responding to the latest clampdown, the Responsible Recycling Alliance, composed of a few California recyclers and manufacturers, argues the bags are reusable and recyclable and that a paper bag-only mandate will “lead to a series of negative, unintended consequences for the environment, businesses, and consumers.”

Conversely, the California Grocers’ Association backs SB 1053.

“We’ve seen our businesses transition to be more environmentally sustainable. We’ve seen our customers transition, and we believe come January 26, when only paper is available, our members will support it. Our customers will support it,” Louis Brown, a spokesperson for the trade group said in a late August news conference.

Plastics manufacturers have been hiding behind recycling to keep selling an unrecyclable product, charges Nick Lapis, director of advocacy for Californians Against Waste. The nonprofit sponsored the bill.

By California law, a product or package is considered “recyclable” if it is collected in programs that serve 60 percent of the population and if it is sorted for processing by high-volume facilities serving at least 60 percent of recycling programs statewide.

A CalRecycle spokesperson wrote to the [LA Times](#) a while back that plastic bags aren’t recycled on a large scale in California, though “some collection programs are accepting bags in case they can find markets.”

With the passage of SB 1053, about 250 million pounds of plastic bags will no longer be generated and disposed, says Mark Murray, executive director, Californians Against Waste.

Lapis expects to see more paper bags but hopes they won’t become the new norm.

“We do not just want a shift from one disposable to another that may not be quite as bad. What we want is a shift to reusables.”

### **AB 660 Food Date Label**

AB 660 requires food manufacturers to use uniform terminology on their labels to indicate "safety" or "quality" dates, and it bans consumer-facing "sell-by" dates.

Work to standardize labels goes back about 10 years, driven by studies showing the leading cause of food waste is consumer confusion about dates on labels. For instance, “sell by” dates are simply intended to inform stores of when they should rotate stock. But people have misinterpreted the term to mean it’s time to throw out what’s in their fridge.

As confusing, manufacturers may use the same language such as “use by” to communicate different messages.

Misunderstandings over expiration dates account for 20 percent of all consumer-generated food wastage, according to ReFED, who says simplifying expiration dates is the most cost-effective way to reduce this tonnage.

The solution is simple; requires no infrastructure; and has a large impact.



AB 660 will codify the industry's own recommended terminology: 1) "Best if used by" or "best if used or frozen by" to indicate the quality date. 2) "Use by" or "use by or freeze by" will indicate the safety date.

The bill was well received in the Assembly but hit a snag when it made it to the Senate Agriculture Committee; grocers and the dairy industry raised concerns that banning "sell by" date labels would complicate their process of tracking the freshness of some products.

Further negotiations and a few amendments brought more alignment among stakeholders.

Manufacturers have until July 2026 to see that the standardized language appears on all labels for goods manufactured after that date.

ReFED is working with other policy experts to push through a Federal Date Labeling Act that has been introduced to the legislature multiple times but is seeming to gain momentum lately, observe advocates.

"[A federal bill] would save businesses from having to follow an ever-changing landscape of laws across states. Also, consumers are becoming more savvy and expecting more from businesses," *Dana Gunders*, executive director of *ReFED*, told *Waste360* earlier in 2024.

"But I think most businesses want to do the right thing. They understand the impacts that wasted food has and want to do their part to help."

### **SB 707. Textiles Recovery/Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)**

The bill establishes a robust EPR program, requiring brands to fund collections, transportation, sorting, repair, and recycling of clothing as well as window coverings, linens, and other home textiles.

A main bill feature is comodulated fees whereby brands with established recycling or repair programs will pay less into the state program, which Joanne Brasch, director of advocacy for the California Product Stewardship Council, believes will level the playing field. The stewardship organization sponsored SB 707.

Thrift stores who choose to become collection sites and or take on sorting will receive funding for their labor and materials. Monies will also pay for services of alteration companies, consumer dry cleaners, commercial laundries, and repair shops.

“With other EPR programs we have had to beg companies to become take back sites. But with this product type, thrift shops, brands, kiosks in parking lots that receive donations, even some haulers want to be part of this. We had to put in a provision to prioritize certain markets,” Brasch says.

To drop a few names, IKEA, Goodwill, Sierra Club California, and Republic Services have all supported the bill in one way or another.

Brasch sees true potential in that fabrics are inherently designed for circularity. They can be recycled at the fiber, yarn, or material levels into new products, which creates more pathways back into the market.

“You can cut a tablecloth into a jacket and the fabric is still a fabric. With a sweater you can pull the yarn, which stays a yarn. If neither of these options is possible you can recycle at the fiber level and shred and twist it back into a yarn,” she says.

### Three bills with a common thread

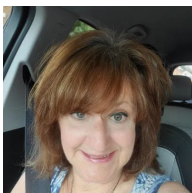
A common denominator among the three bills is they address products that are prevalent in the waste stream that have substantial greenhouse gas impact, surmise Brasch, Lapis, and others who supported each rule.

Says Brasch, “They each provide clear, convenient solutions to issues common in households that engage residents without burdening them from a financial perspective.”

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