



CALIFORNIA

California lawmakers pass bills to ban plastic ‘reusable’ shopping bags

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SAN DIEGO (FOX 5/KUSI) — Two bills aiming to close a loophole in California’s single-use plastic bag ban that allows for stores to distribute “recyclable” alternatives passed through the State Senate earlier this week with overwhelming support from lawmakers.

[Senate Bill 1053](#), introduced by State Sens. Catherine Blakespear (D-Encinitas) and Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica), was approved by the chamber in a 30-7 floor vote on Tuesday. It will now move onto the State Assembly, who also just passed an identical bill — [Assembly Bill 2236](#) introduced by Asm. Rebecca Bauer-Kahan (D-Orinda) — in a 51-7 vote.



“California’s original ban on plastic bags hasn’t worked out as planned, and sadly, the state’s plastic bag waste has increased dramatically since it went into effect,” Blakespear said in a statement on Tuesday. “California must do its part to eliminate this scourge that is contaminating our environment.”

California implemented its single-use plastic bag ban in 2016. It came two years after a bill creating it was signed into law due to a bid by plastic manufacturers to halt its enforcement by putting the ban before voters in a statewide referendum.

The original ban included an exception that would allow retailers to use the plastic bags with a slightly thicker film coating, allowing it to have more than 125 uses or carry 22 pounds over a distance of 175 feet. At the time, these types of bags were considered “recyclable” or reusable.

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This determination, however, has since been walked back by state regulators, with CalRecycle designating the bags’ material as not recyclable last year.

Lawmakers have also flagged how this exception bypasses the intention of the ban, which was to reduce the amount of plastic waste headed towards landfills across the state in an effort to lower greenhouse gas emissions and other harmful impacts that originate from these sites.

In 2014, when the ban was first introduced, lawmakers questioned whether consumers would treat the film bags as “reusable” in practice or if they would discard them like other single-use bags in an [State Senate Environmental Quality analysis](#) on the bill.

That suspicion has turned into a reality in recent years: CalRecycle has observed a roughly 47% increase since 2014 in the number of merchandise and grocery bags ending up as waste, despite the ban on single-use shopping bags.

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“California’s current bag ban law, which allows businesses to replace thin plastic bags with supposedly reusable ones at checkout, clearly is not working,” Jenn Engstrom, state director of CALPRIG, said in a statement on Tuesday.

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“Plastic companies mass-producing thicker bags circumvent the law’s intent,” she continued. “Then, inevitably, discarded bags pollute our communities and environment. We’re thankful the state legislature is taking action to finally ban plastic grocery bags once and for all.”

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Opponents of the revision, which includes plastics manufacturers and recyclers, contest the scope of these impacts on the state, arguing it could also have unintended consequences like the elimination of green manufacturing groups and a “viable avenue for recycling flexible packaging.”

With lawmakers advancing both SB 1053 and its mirror Assembly Bill, it is likely the revision will head to the governor’s desk later this year. Both houses of the state legislature will have until Aug. 31 to pass bills, ahead of Gov. Gavin Newsom’s deadline to sign them into law on Sept. 30.

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