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Single-use plastic bags will be history in Oregon

HB 2509: Bans single-use plastic checkout bags statewide

SALEM – Single-use plastic bags for groceries, restaurant takeout and other retail items will be a thing of the past, under a bill approved by the Oregon Senate today.

[House Bill 2509](#) – which passed with a 17-12 vote on the Senate floor – prohibits retail establishments and restaurants from providing single-use plastic checkout bags to customers. Under the bill, those establishments would be able to provide consumers with recycled paper bags or reusable plastic bags for a fee of at least 5 cents, paid by the consumer.

“Plastic bags are difficult to recycle and are light enough to be blown around easily,” Sen. Michael Dembrow (D-Portland) said. “As a result, they are strewn all over the place and are a common form of pollution in our world’s oceans. They don’t biodegrade and so the only way to rid ourselves of them is to stop using them. Much like in the case of polystyrene, something we use once shouldn’t be able to pollute our environment for hundreds of years.”

Bags that will be exempted from this law include those used to package bulk items such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, grains, greeting cards or small hardware items; contain or wrap frozen food, meat, fish, flowers, a potted plant or other items because of dampness or sanitation; contain an unwrapped prepared food or bakery good; contain a prescription drug; newspaper bags; door hanger bags; laundry bags; dry cleaning bags; and bags sold in a package of multiple units and intended to store food, be used as trash bags or collect pet waste.

Recycled paper and reusable plastic bags can be given to customers using vouchers under the Women, Infants and Children Program who use electronic benefits transfer cards issued by the Oregon Department of Human Services.

Across the United States, 12 state legislatures have considered measures to regulate using single-use checkout bags, especially plastic bags, at grocery stores and other businesses. Maine enacted the first of these in 1991, requiring retailers to provide checkout bag recycling as a condition of providing plastic bags to customers at the time goods are sold. Other states have imposed bans or fees on single-use checkout bags. In Oregon, 10 cities have banned single-use checkout bags, beginning with Portland in 2011. Each city's policy is slightly different. This bill will create statewide consistency, which is the primary reason it is supported by the Northwest Grocery Association.

"Oregon's local governments already have been stepping up to do their part," Dembrow said. "But we need a consistent, statewide effort to have a truly meaningful impact in keeping plastic bags out of our natural environment and out of our oceans, where they are doing significant damage to aquatic life."

House Bill 2509 now goes to Gov. Kate Brown for her signature.

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