

WestHollywoodPatch

GOVERNMENT

Local Officials Push for Plastic Bag Ban

A bill being debated by the state Senate would ban the use of plastic grocery bags in West Hollywood and throughout California.

By **Anne Louise Bannon** August 31, 2010

In an effort to pressure state legislators to pass a bill banning the use of plastic grocery bags, Los Angeles County Supervisor **Zev Yaroslavsky** (<http://zev.lacounty.gov/>), whose district includes West Hollywood, held a news conference Sunday with L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announcing that the county and city of Los Angeles will each draft a ban on the ubiquitous bags if the bill does not pass.

The state Senate is scheduled to vote Tuesday on the bill—the final day of this legislative session—and if **AB 1998** (http://www.cawrecycles.org/issues/current_legislation/ab1998_10), does not pass, it will die and the process will have to begin again.

AB 1998 would prohibit grocery stores, pharmacies, convenience stores and similar stores from distributing single-use plastic bags.

"The biggest hurdle right now is the Senate," said Linda Rapattoni, spokesperson for Assemblywoman Julia Brownley (D-Santa Monica), who authored the bill, which also lists West Hollywood Assemblyman **Mike Feuer** (<http://www.assembly.ca.gov/feuer>) among its 19 co-authors.

As of this posting, the bill is being debated on the Senate floor, but Rapattoni noted in an e-mail that the senators could delay the vote until later in the day.

The bill would ban the use of plastic grocery bags, as well as paper grocery bags, in stores selling food. Clothing retailers are not affected, unless the store also sells groceries, as do retailers like Target and Walmart. There is a provision in the bill requiring stores to sell paper bags that have 40 percent or more recycled post-consumer waste in them at cost to customers.

The bill would require retailers to sell recycled-content paper bags for their actual average cost, according to the Californian's Against Waste [website](http://www.cawrecycles.org/issues/current_legislation/ab1998_10) (http://www.cawrecycles.org/issues/current_legislation/ab1998_10). The site says, "By ending the practice of hiding the costs of single-use bags, consumers will be able to make better informed decisions on whether to purchase single-use bags or to use reusable bags for free."

"It's a great bill for the environment," said Kearsten Shepherd, who is working with the Yes on AB 1998 group called No More Urban Tumbleweeds.

Shepherd pointed out that the plastic bags are not only an eyesore, they have proven harmful to all kinds of sea animals, as well as costing the state millions to clean them up.

According to a fact sheet provided by Rapattoni, it is estimated that the bags alone cost the state \$25 million annually to clean up off of public roads, beaches and other land. In spite of recycling programs in place in grocery stores, only 5 percent of the 19 billion bags used are recycled.

The bill has wide backing, not only from environmental organizations, but also from the [California Grocers Association](http://www.cagrocers.com/) (<http://www.cagrocers.com/>), which represents the group most heavily impacted by the legislation.

"We wanted a single statewide standard instead of a patchwork of local ordinances," said Dave Heylan, spokesperson for the grocers group, explaining that among cities and counties that already have bans, the regulations can vary widely, with some cities opting to ban only plastic bags, others banning both paper and plastic, and still others just requiring a charge on bags.

"So from our standpoint, this makes the most logical sense. It provides the most environmental impact with the least impact on our members," said Heylan.

According to Rapattoni, Brownley has been working on a ban for several years, but earlier bills failed to pass. Feuer, according to a spokesperson in his office, has consistently voted for a ban when the issue has come up.

West Hollywood Patch will have an update Wednesday on how the Senate voted.



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