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2019 ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITY | SB 5323 | HB 1205

Sponsors: Senator Mona Das & Representative Strom Peterson

Reducing Plastic Pollution

On average, Americans use 500 plastic bags per year. That's 2 billion used in Washington alone!

Thin plastic bags are used for only a few minutes and discarded. Bags are made from finite, nonrenewable natural gas and oil resources. Only 6% of these bags are ever recycled. Plastic bags are one of the most commonly-found items that litter state roads, beaches, and other public spaces. Bags blow into our waterways and the ocean, clog the stomachs of wildlife, and break down into smaller pieces that make their way into the food chain. They break up but do not biodegrade, lasting for years.

Plastic bags are a major contamination problem in bales of recyclables and in our commercial compost. Bags clog recycling equipment by wrapping around large rollers in the system. WA Ecology estimates that it costs \$700-\$1000 per ton for recycling centers to remove plastic films from other recyclables.

THERE IS A GROWING MOVEMENT

More and more people have become aware of the problems caused by single-use plastic items, and, in particular, plastic bags. Last year, Kroger—the 2nd largest grocery retailer in the US after Walmart—announced that they are phasing out plastic carry-home bags by 2025. In Washington, Kroger's QFC is phasing them out by December 2019.

Many countries have passed bag laws regulating the use of single-use plastic carry-home bags. Locally, 27 jurisdictions (representing over 25% of Washington's population) have passed bag ordinances. A statewide law builds on these existing ordinances and provides consistency for consumers across Washington.



This is one of the 2019 Environmental Priorities presented by a coalition of over twenty organizations in Washington committed to advancing strong environmental policy.

CONTACT

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THE REUSABLE BAG BILL WILL...

- Prohibit the provision of single-use thin plastic carryout bags at all retailers in Washington.
- Require a pass-through charge of 10 cents on all paper carryout bags and durable reusable plastic film bags (to encourage shoppers to bring their own reusable carryout bags). The pass-through charge is retained by retailers and helps cover the stores' cost of providing these more expensive bags. Recipients of food assistance programs are exempt from the pass-through charge.
- Require that retailers offer carryout bags that are made with recycled content.
- Require that compostable bags, such as those used for produce, be green or brown tinted to reduce confusion by consumers and keep non-compostable plastics out of our commercial compost.
- Require an education and outreach campaign so that consumers become aware of the new requirements.
- Include exemptions such as bags used for produce, newspapers, dry cleaning, small hardware items, prescription drugs, unwrapped prepared foods or bakery goods, frozen foods, meat, fish, flowers, and potted plants (and other items where dampness or sanitation might be a problem).

