

Lawmaker wants plastic bags banned throughout California

By Megan Hansen, Marin Independent Journal

Assemblyman Marc Levine, in his first piece of legislation, is calling for banning plastic grocery bags throughout California, starting in 2015.

Levine, D-San Rafael, introduced Assembly Bill 158 this month, reviving a similar bill that got stuck in a Senate committee last year after it faced criticism from plastic bag manufacturers and grocers.

“A similar bill was held up in the Senate, but that’s not a reason to advance good public policy,” Levine said. “This is about advancing good environmental policy and best business practices.”

Levine said plastic bags have a drastic impact on the environment, killing hundreds of thousands of marine fish and mammals each year. He said banning them could reduce beach debris by about 10 percent.

Under the bill, grocery stores with more than \$2 million in annual sales or retailers with more than 10,000-square-feet of floor space would have to stop offering plastic bags.

These stores would be required to provide free recycled paper bags for their customers through July 30, 2016. After that, Levine said stores could charge a fee for recycled paper bags.

As part of the bill, stores would also be required to sell reusable grocery bags.

It’s no surprise Levine is advancing the legislation, coming from a county where a plastic bag ban has been in place in unincorporated areas since Jan. 1, 2012. Under Marin County’s

ban, grocers can charge at least 5 cents for a recycled paper bag.

In addition, Fairfax has banned plastic bags since its residents in 2008 approved the idea with 79 percent majority vote.

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Levine said the plastic bag ban won't apply to small bags in the produce area used for fruits and vegetables.

AB158 is being coauthored by Assemblyman Wesley Chesbro, D-Arcata, Tom Ammiano, D-San Francisco, and Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach. Levine said other legislators have also expressed interest in supporting the bill.

State legislation to ban plastic bags has been debated for several years. In 2010, a bill backed by both grocers and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger didn't make it out of the state Legislature due to heavy opposition from the plastics industry.

Last May, Hawaii made headlines when it became the first state to ban plastic bags. San Francisco was the first city in the nation to ban them in 2007.

The last attempt to impose a statewide ban was put forth by termed-out Assemblywoman Julia Brownley, D-Santa Monica, in 2011. Her bill reached the Senate Appropriations Committee after a committee staff analysis indicated the ban would cost \$200,000 to implement.

Levine said there are multiple cities and counties throughout the state enacting plastic bag bans, each with different rules and regulations. An uniformed state law would streamline plastic bag reduction efforts.

"We're trying to make it easier for people, because those laws

would apply the same way," Levine said.

Levine said he's ready to take on critics and fight for the environment.

"If oil and plastic companies want to put up a fight, we're on the right side of the argument," Levine said.