

Grocers group supports plastic bag ban

By Marc Lifsher, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – A drive to ban most stores from handing out single-use plastic bags got an important boost Monday when the California Grocers Association announced its support for a bill.

The measure by state Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Pacoima, would prohibit the bags in grocery stores and pharmacies beginning on Jan. 1, 2015. Shoppers would be urged to bring their own reusable cloth or plastic bags or would have the option of paying the actual cost of a paper bag, estimated at 10 cents or less.

Convenience and liquor stores would face the same requirements on Jan. 1, 2016.

An initial hearing on SB405 in the Senate Environmental Quality Committee is set for Wednesday.

The proposal, if it becomes law, would supersede roughly 70 local plastic bag ordinances, such as those in Los Angeles County and the cities of Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Long Beach, Pasadena and West Hollywood.

The South Lake Tahoe City Council this year said it preferred to keep plastic bags, despite a growing trend do the opposite.

“It is time for a statewide single-use plastic bag ban in California,” Padilla said at a Capitol news conference.

Ron Fong, president of the California Grocers Association, said his 400 members back Padilla’s bill because it provides “consistency and predictability for consumers.” Complying with dozens of slightly different city and county laws is

complicated and expensive, he said.

Single-use bags are a form of “urban tumbleweed” that fouls creek beds, parks and beaches and is harmful to wildlife and marine animals, environmentalists contend. The bags also are difficult to recycle, with less than 5 percent being repurposed, they said.

“They blow off the face of landfills and out of transfer stations,” said Mark Murray, executive director of Californians Against Waste. “This is a problem product and the best solution is to phase them out.”

Plastic bag manufacturers counter that their products are made of 100 percent recyclable material that is regularly reused by consumers. Light-weight plastic bags take up less room than paper bags in landfills and account for only 2 percent of all litter, said a fact sheet from a trade group called the American Progressive Bag Alliance.

Padilla’s proposal is not the only one dealing with single-use plastic bags this legislative session. A rival one by Sen. Lois Wolk, D-Davis, would put a 5-cent tax on all single-use plastic and paper shopping bags.