



**DATE:** February 28, 2024

**TO:** Waste Management Authority (WMA) Board/Energy Council

**FROM:** Meri Soll, Senior Program Manager  
Else Lebsack, Program Manager

**SUBJECT:** Update on Reusable Bag Laws

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## **SUMMARY**

In 2012, the WMA passed a countywide Reusable Bag Ordinance that banned flimsy plastic bags and required a 10-cent charge at point of sale for both paper bags and thick, reusable plastic bags at around 1,500 grocery, drug, pharmacy, convenience, and liquor stores. Initially, the law was very effective, resulting in a substantial increase in consumers bringing their own bags and a reduction in the number of both paper and plastic bags distributed at point of sale. In 2016, the WMA voted to expand the law to 14,000 retail stores and restaurants in Alameda County. At the February 28 board meeting, staff will provide an update on the ordinance as well as state and local laws affecting bags distributed at point of sale, including recently proposed amendments to State legislation related to plastic bags.

## **DISCUSSION**

The countywide law was initially very successful at reducing both paper bags and the flimsy, litter-prone plastic bags distributed at point of sale. Consumers reacted to the 10-cent charge for either a paper or durable, thick plastic bag (allowed under the law) by bringing their own bags. Staff monitors bag purchasing data from four different types of large and small “chain” stores affected by the law with multiple store locations (52 stores in total) in Alameda County. Comparing pre-ordinance (2012) bag purchasing data to the first three years after the ordinance was put into place (2013 -2015), stores purchased 88 percent fewer paper and plastic bags because of the law. Very few thick plastic bags were purchased these first three years due in large part to the high cost of those bags.

Ten years after the ordinance has been in effect, there is still a decrease in both paper and plastic bag purchased by these stores. However, 2023 bag purchasing data shows a reduction of only 63 percent below pre-ordinance volumes compared to the 88 percent reduction in the first three years after the law was passed. These stores are purchasing more bags in response to shoppers not regularly bringing their own bag as they did in the early years of the law. Reasons for these trends include COVID-19, store cashiers inconsistently asking shoppers if they need a bag for ten-cents, and consumers adjusting to the ten-cent fee.

In 2016, California implemented a statewide bag law (SB 270), similar to the WMA 2012 countywide ordinance in banning single-use flimsy plastic bags at stores that sell food and liquor including grocery, pharmacies, convenience and liquor stores and requires a 10-cent charge for either a paper or durable plastic bag. With the passage of SB 270, demand for thicker plastic bags compliant with the law created an increase in production which has driven a lower price point for those plastic bags, making them comparable to the cost of paper bags. As a result, there have been more of these thicker plastic bags in distribution. Recent parking lot surveys and data show an increase in both purchase and distribution of these thicker plastic bags since 2016, with little evidence that they are being reused for carryout purposes.

This month, the California legislature introduced AB 2236 and SB 1053 in an effort to ban film plastic shopping bags statewide. The bills would remove the option to have any kind of film plastic bags, including thicker plastic bags, at stores currently affected by SB 270. Staff is coordinating with Californians Against Waste to provide comments and input related to draft bill language. At this meeting, staff will provide an overview of these laws as well as hold space for board discussion around potential areas of opportunity for StopWaste to influence state and local legislation.

**RECOMMENDATION**

This item is for information only.