

L.A. County Board of Supervisors to consider plastic bag ban

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California failed to pass a plastic bag ban earlier this year, but L.A. County's moving forward with an ambitious plastic bag ban plan. Why? The plastic bag industry failed to meet its own voluntary reduction goals for plastic bag use.

Serious environmental activists against disposable plastic bags may remember that back in 2008, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors voted after much debate to give the plastic industry yet another chance to [reduce plastic bag use voluntarily](#) — 30% by 2010, and 65% by 2013. Fail to meet those goals, and a plastic bag would kick in.

I was at that meeting, and thought that the industry would surely meet the 30% reduction goal — then perhaps fail to meet the more ambitious 65% goal. I was wrong. Apparently, voluntary efforts to curb plastic bag waste failed pretty miserably. Director of Public Works Gail Farber details that failure in the [letter to the Board of Supervisors recommending a plastic bag ban](#) (PDF):

Public Works determined that the voluntary Single-Use Bag Reduction and Recycling Program (Program) was not successful in achieving its goals. Over a two-year period and despite State law requirements under AB 2449 (stores are to maintain and make available to local jurisdictions records for a minimum of three years describing the collection, transport, and recycling of plastic bags), stores in the County unincorporated areas did not provide data that would enable Public Works staff to determine if the voluntary Program benchmark of 30 percent disposal reduction of plastic bags by July 1, 2010, was met. In addition, throughout the course of the voluntary Program, not more than eight (8) stores at any given time had met the minimum participation levels. Although the public education and outreach aspects of the voluntary Program, including the [Brag About Your Bag Campaign](#)®, raised awareness of the impacts of single-use bags and the benefits of reusable bags, it could not be determined if this awareness translated into a shift in consumer behavior that was significant enough to address the major objectives of the County.

The Board of Supervisors are expected to consider the ban at its meeting on Tuesday ([PDF of agenda](#)). The proposed ban, which would affect neighborhoods in Los Angeles County unincorporated areas, would ban single-use plastic bags (except those thinner produce bags) at supermarkets and large retail pharmacies by July 1, 2011, and at liquor stores and food marts by January 1, 2012. Paper bags, so long as they're made with 40% post-consumer recycled waste and 100% recyclable, would still be allowed — but cost 10 cents each, with the money collected going to pay for the cost of the bags themselves, as well as the cost of complying with the ban and of educating customers about reusable bag use.

Have an opinion on the ban? Speak up during the public comment section at The Board of Supervisors meeting on Tue., Nov. 16, starting at 9:30 am at the LA County Board of Supervisors, Hall of Administration, 500 W. Temple St., Los Angeles. For the pro-ban camp, [Heal the Bay's organizing a rally to ban the bag](#) right before the meeting, starting at 8:30 am.

Photo: [Kate Ter Harr/Flickr](#)

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