

AB 521 (Hueso and Stone)

Reducing Marine Plastic Pollution through Producer Responsibility

SUMMARY

AB 521 would help reduce the amount of plastic garbage that pollutes California waterways and coastlines. The bill would establish a new program to prevent plastic pollution from reaching California's marine environment by requiring producers of the most prevalent items to be responsible for the reduction of this pollution.

PROBLEM

Once released into the environment, plastic does not biodegrade. Although plastic breaks-down into smaller plastic pieces, they remain in the environment and accumulate in waterways until reaching the ocean. This marine plastic pollution is hurting California's environment and economy. Plastic litter pollutes our beaches, harms our wildlife, and places a significant financial burden on state and local governments due to associated cleanup and lost tourism revenue.

Of the many types of litter that end up in the ocean, plastic products have some of the most serious impacts on marine life.ⁱ A 2012 study by the Convention on Biological Diversity found that 663 marine species have been impacted by marine plastic litter through entanglement and ingestion—a two-thirds increase in species from a similar study in 1998.

Marine plastic pollution imposes substantial costs on taxpayers and local governments through cleanup efforts and lost tourism revenue. A 2012 report by the US EPA found California's coastal cities and counties spend about \$420 million each year to combat litter and curtail marine debris.ⁱⁱ

Because marine plastic pollution is a persistent problem with many sources, a comprehensive solution is necessary.

EXISTING POLICY

California statute establishes a statewide goal requiring at least 75% of solid waste generated in the state to be source-reduced, recycled or composted by

2020, with CalRecycle directed to realize this goal. In addition, California's Ocean Protection Council (OPC) identified marine plastic pollution as a priority and established a goal to reduce the negative impacts of land-based activities including marine debris on marine ecosystems and the coastal economy. The State Water Resource Control Board (SWRCB) has also identified trash as a priority and is developing a statewide trash policy that will identify trash as a pollutant in waterways and establish methods to control it.

In addition, many local governments have taken action to prevent marine plastic pollution through bans and fees on problematic single-use items, such as plastic bags and polystyrene.

AB 521 would enhance, expand, and coordinate existing local and state marine plastic pollution prevention measures and provide urgently needed resources to achieve a more comprehensive solution.

SOLUTION

AB 521 would require California to adopt a statewide goal to reduce marine plastic pollution by 75% by 2020 and by 95% by 2024. The bill would direct CalRecycle, in coordination with OPC and SWRCB, to establish a program that would:

- Identify the items that are the top contributors to marine plastic pollution
- Set reduction targets for these items
- Require producers of these items to meet the targets within established timeframes
- Require the producers to pay for the administration of this program

Within guidance provided by the agencies, producers have flexibility to determine the methods that work best for them to achieve the established targets, such as improved product design and increased recycling.

ⁱTen Brink, P., I. Lutchman, S. Bassi, S. Speck, S. Sheavly, K. Register, and C. Woolaway. 2009. *Guidelines on the Use of Market-based Instruments to Address the Problem of Marine Litter*. Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), Brussels, Belgium, and Sheavly Consultants, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA.

ⁱⁱStickel, B.H., A. Jahn, and W. Kier. 2012. *The Cost to West Coast Communities of Dealing with Trash, Reducing Marine Debris*. Prepared by Kier Associates for U.S. EPA, Region 9, Order for Services EPG12900098

AB 521 would both reduce the source of costly plastic pollution and provide support and funding for state and local plastic pollution cleanup efforts.

STATUS

- Bill has been introduced

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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¹Ten Brink, P., I. Lutchman, S. Bassi, S. Speck, S. Sheavly, K. Register, and C. Woolaway. 2009. *Guidelines on the Use of Market-based Instruments to Address the Problem of Marine Litter*. Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), Brussels, Belgium, and Sheavly Consultants, Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA.

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