

## Legislation to ban plastic bags at stores moves forward

By Patriot Ledger staff and State House News Service

**The Patriot Ledger**

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What's this?

BOSTON — Massachusetts could become the first state to ban plastic bags at large retail stores, part of an effort to protect marine life and reduce waste scattered on streets and stuck in tree branches.

Lawmakers on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Committee moved the legislation forward following a hearing Monday.

"We wanted to make a statement on Earth Day," said state Sen. Marc Pacheco, D-Taunton, the committee's chairman.

The bill would ban single-use plastic bags at stores and restaurants larger than 4,000 square feet. The ban would exempt smaller stores and not include plastic produce and bakery bags used in grocery stores.

Pacheco said there has been no economic damage in other communities where the bans have been enacted.

But the state's largest retail group opposes the ban, saying it is impractical and unfairly singles out retailers as a source of litter.

"The bag doesn't end up on the tree on its own," said Bill Rennie, vice president of the Retailers Association of Massachusetts. "It's more of a societal problem."

Many stores now offer a choice of paper, plastic or recyclable bags, Rennie said.

"For retailers, the customer is always right and we like to protect consumer choice," he said.

Lawmakers cited environmental concerns in supporting the ban.

"I'm generally not one that likes to intrude upon the affairs of business, but at this point I think that the scales have tipped to the point where something has to be done," Sen. Robert Hedlund, R-Weymouth, said.

Rep. Lori Ehrlich, D-Marblehead, who sponsored one of the bills given a favorable recommendation, said 10 percent of the debris that washes up on the shore is plastic bags.

"Nothing that we use for a few minutes should pollute the oceans for hundreds of years," Ehrlich said.

Ehrlich's bill makes an exception for certain biodegradable plastic bags.

Hundreds of communities across the country have instituted some type of ban. Mostly recently in Massachusetts, Brookline and Manchester-by-the-Sea approved bans. No state has enacted a statewide ban. However, Hawaii does have a de-facto statewide ban, with all four counties in the state now banning non-biodegradable plastic bags at checkout.

Environmentalists said the bags are a danger to the state's coastlines, and kill sea turtles, whales, seals and other marine wildlife that swallow plastic or get strangled by the bags.

In 2007, major grocery chains in Massachusetts entered an agreement with the state to reduce the total number of paper and plastic bags distributed by 33 percent by 2013. The industry met that goal in 2010, said Brian Houghton, vice president of the Boston-based Massachusetts Food Association.

"We just want the program to continue to work and let them give it a chance," Houghton said. "People still want plastic bags every so often if you're buying something frozen or buying fish or meat."

The issue hit close to home for Hedlund when he was participating in the Back River herring run cleanup in Weymouth earlier this month. Plastic bags floated down the river and were wedged between rocks.

"They don't degrade. They last forever," Hedlund said. "The environmental impact outweighs all other impacts. We'll have to go back to doing it the way we did before plastic bags proliferated."

*Patriot Ledger reporters Steve Adams and Dan Schneider and State House News Service contributed to this report.*

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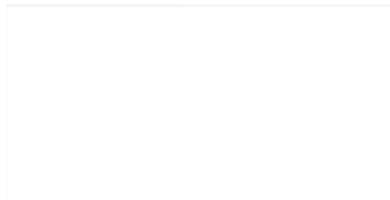
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We wanted to make a statement on Earth Day, said state Sen. Marc Pacheco

Yeah, well you're making one alright. We have become a police state. A mamby pamby state that thinks we can BAN and make LAWS about every freaking thing. Massachusetts sucks. We've gone over the top into the lunatic liberal stage. What's next? Monitor how much oxygen each and every person is using per day? I understand the reasons, but banning everything isn't the answer. Sooner or later, they'll ban something YOU don't want them to. Simply let it be a stores decision.

Let's rename the state to Bloombergachusetts, the commonwealth of corruption and ridiculous laws. Everyone run out and buy buckle shoes and three point hats because they may ban electricity next.

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Another reason to shop in NH.

And the stores go back to paper bags which consume millions of trees each year plus the pollution caused by paper production.

And those bags stuck in trees? They seem to be gone in a few weeks. They don't stay in the trees for "hundreds of years".

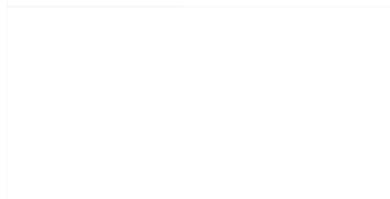
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I see more lottery tickets littering the streets then I see plastic bags in trees.

Would they dare ban lottery tickets?!?!?

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. Its more of a societal problem.

Many stores now offer a choice of paper, plastic or recyclable bags, Rennie (president of the Retailers Association of Massachusetts) said.

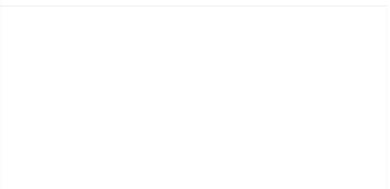
I thought the law was they retailers MUST give you that choice. But like the 'Must have a price sticker on each item that was routinely ignored until the law was recently changed it hadn't been done in decades.

And if we forget our reusable bags and resort to ask for paper we get 'oh we don't have any.

And these bags are made from OIL!!! More dollars going to the countries that supply our terrorists.

As far as a societal problem. Sure blame the other girl. It's them not us. We only want to save corporate dollars.

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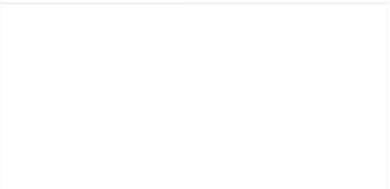


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How about the people that recycle their plastic bags into their homes for other uses.

So I'll now go out and buy more trash bags.

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Maybe we should enforce the littering laws and increase the fines. The cities and towns could ticket for all littering such as cigarette butts, food wraps and even gum. The police seem to like to sit in one place with radar so now they can target litterers as well.

I happen to like the plastic bags as they are much more convenient than paper or the canvas bags.  
jw20000  
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When I hear the Bag Ban lobby comments about bags that last 1,000's of years, Litter the countryside, and pollute the oceans, I am reminded of the typical TV courtroom drama. 'Objection, those facts are not in evidence.' All scientific Environmental Impact Statements report that 6 gram plastic grocery bags have the lowest impact to the environment. The latest is from the UK Environment Agency. It is titled 'Life Cycle Assessment of Supermarket Carrier Bags'. Check it out. at environment-agency.gov.uk. IT was blocked from release to the public for years by Bag Banners who disagreed with the science that did not support their emotional feelings. Paper bags are the worst, even recycled bags contribute to green house gas emissions and deforestation. Reusable bags are made of PLASTIC fiber textiles. If you reuse the typical 'free' plastic grocery bag for household trash, or lunch bags, doggy bags, diaper bags, compost, etc, then you would need to use a Reusable bag over 300 cycles to break even on Environmental Impact. They don't last that long. They require near slave labor to produce including Child labor according to reporters that visit the 'factories'. Should we as a society contribute to crimes against humanity to feel good about our grocery bags? Bags that are largely made from WASTE natural gas, not oil as reported by Greenwashing advocates. PS. Bag Producers LOVE bag bans. They sell bags by the lb. When 6 gram bags are banned, a few months later, householders run out of their personal stash of bags under the Kitchen counter and have to purchase expensive 18 gram trash bags in cardboard boxes to replace them. Sales increase dramatically like they did in Ireland after their bag ban. Landfill Plastic tonnage increases as well. More Environmental Impact. The Law of Unintended Consequences.

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