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Bills that reduce plastics pass senate floor

Plastic bag and straw bills advance in Washington legislature

OLYMPIA: On Tuesday night, the Senate passed, with bipartisan support (31-14-4), the Reusable Bag Bill, [ESSB 5323](#), which will reduce plastic pollution in Washington by banning single-use plastic bags at all stores. Earlier, on Monday night, the Senate voted 27-21-1 to pass a bill, [ESSB 5077](#), that would require that straws be only offered on request.

“The bag bill will make a significant difference in terms of reducing litter in our communities, protecting wildlife in our rivers and marine waters, and keeping our recycling machinery running smoothly and cost-effectively,” said Sen. Mona Das, its prime sponsor in the Senate.

“It is just common sense that we reduce our use of straws,” said Senator Patty Kuderer, the prime sponsor of the straw bill. “This bill will reduce waste, while also making sure plastic straws are always available for those who want them due to medical or disability needs.”

Plastic has been documented in [hundreds of species](#) of marine life, including gray whales found washed up on the shores of the Salish Sea, 86% of all sea turtle species, 44% of all seabird species, and 43% of all marine mammal species. Ingesting these fragments is often fatal.

“We have collected thousands of pounds of marine debris in our beach cleanups, and most of that is plastic,” said Gus Gates, Washington Policy Manager for the Surfrider Foundation. “In 2017, for the first time, all of the top ten items found in the international coastal cleanups were plastic.”

“We can keep plastics out of our ocean so they don’t pose a danger to whales, fish, and birds,” said Dr. Erin Meyer, Director of Conservation Programs and Partnerships at the Seattle Aquarium. “We can be part of the solution by bringing our own bags or saying no to a straw, and we believe Washingtonians are ready for a transition.”

“These bills are good steps towards making sure that we have clean water across the state,” said Chris Wilke, Executive Director, Puget Soundkeeper. “We need to stop the load of plastics that get picked up by stormwater and make its way into our rivers, lakes and marine waterways.”

“The straw will save money for restaurants,” noted Heather Trim, Executive Director, Zero Waste Washington.

“In addition, it takes at least one hour for each eight-hour shift for the workers in our recycling facilities to remove plastic bags and film that clog their machinery, costing ratepayers and creating dangerous conditions for the workers.”

The bag bill builds on the 28 existing local bag ordinances in Washington.

The straw bill was initially brought to Senator Kuderer by students from Lake Washington High School. Straw Kids, a group of elementary-school aged children also provided testimony in the policy committee hearing.

Another bill that addresses plastic reduction, [SHB 1632](#), has not yet been pulled to the House floor. This bill, whose prime sponsor is Rep. Mia Gregerson, is similar to the straw bill and would require that straws, utensils and condiments be only offered to customers on request.

The companion Reusable Bag Bill in the House, primed by Rep. Strom Peterson, [2SHB 1205](#), has also not yet been pulled to the floor.

“We are seeing broad, bi-partisan support for policies to reduce plastic,” said Bruce Speight, Executive Director of Environment Washington. “We’re excited to work with Republicans and Democrats to solve this problem. Nothing we use for a few minutes should pollute our oceans and rivers and threaten wildlife for centuries.”

The plastics bills are supported by a partnership of organizations:

- **Environment Washington** is a statewide citizen-based environmental advocacy organization combining independent research, practical ideas and tough-minded advocacy.
- **Puget Soundkeeper’s** mission is to protect and preserve the waters of Puget Sound.
- **Seattle Aquarium** inspires conservation and takes action for our marine environment.
- **Surfrider Foundation** is dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's ocean, waves and beaches through a powerful activist network.
- **Zero Waste Washington** protects people and our natural world by advocating for products designed and produced to be healthy, safe, and continually recycled and reused.