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Laws addressing recycling crisis signed by Washington Governor Jay Inslee

OLYMPIA: Today Governor Jay Inslee signed into law [SB 5397](#), which initiates a study for the management of plastic packaging in Washington State through product stewardship, industry-led initiatives and other options.

As he signed the bill, the governor commented, “Single-use plastics – including plastic packaging – are a visible and growing concern as millions of tons of plastics enter the marine environment every year. This bill recognizes that the companies that produce the plastic packaging must be involved in finding ways to reduce its environmental impact.”

Earlier, on April 29, the governor signed [HB 1543](#), that will promote end-markets for recyclables in Washington and create plans to reduce contamination.

SB 5397 will collect key data needed to manage the load of plastic packaging in Washington

“Washingtonians are great recyclers. However, as a state, we need to do a better job of reducing plastic waste and reusing and recycling what is left. The plastic packaging industry must be a better partner and needs to step up to help local governments and consumers do what's right,” said Sen. Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island, prime sponsor of SB 5397. “This bill directs the Department of Ecology to document the scope of the problem in Washington and outline what actions will be necessary to fully address plastic packaging through industry-led initiatives.”

SB 5397 directs an independent study of the amount and types of plastic packaging coming into the state and the disposal and recycling of that packaging, including costs. Producer responsibility programs and industry-based initiatives will be compiled as potential models for Washington.

“The proliferation of plastic packaging and the impacts on the environment when not properly managed is of immense concern,” said Rep. Strom Peterson, D-Edmonds, the prime sponsor of the House companion bill (HB 1204). “This bill is a critical next step to determine how the state can engage plastic manufacturers to take responsibility and address this threat, including expanding responsible recycling options.”

In 2018, China announced that it would severely restrict the import of waste and recyclables. The loss of this market - they were taking about 45% of the world’s recyclables and scrap materials – has caused backups of some recyclable items with material has been sent to the landfill in a few instances. Service providers have had to increase rates in some cities and counties due to the reduced markets.

“This law will lead to future legislation that will provide a sustainable means of ensuring that all plastic packaging is properly managed and plastic packaging litter is cleaned up” said Heather Trim, Executive Director of Zero Waste Washington. “We often hear from Washington residents that they want less plastic waste and that they are highly engaged in recycling and pollution reduction.”

HB 1543 will enable incentives to develop end markets for recyclables and plans to reduce contamination

The Department of Ecology has been already taken steps to address our recycling crisis. HB 1543 provides additional tools and directs funding for planning and development of incentives for businesses to develop end markets in Washington. It also requires updated plans to reduce contamination in our recyclables. Plastics, metals, glass and paper all have value if they are separated but when they are in the wrong bales, they become contamination.

“We’ve all seen the upsetting images of wildlife like birds, turtles and other fish with plastic garbage stuck around their throats or filling their stomachs,” said Rep. Jared Mead, D-Mill Creek, lead sponsor of HB 1543. “And we’ve all walked the beautiful Washington shores in the summer and had to be careful to avoid stepping on the broken glass or sharp plastic trash laying around. This is a man-made problem. It requires a man-made solution.”

“I have heard from my constituents that they are concerned about plastic pollution and the recycling situation,” said Sen. Mona Das, D-Kent, prime sponsor of companion bill SB 5545. “People want to do the right thing and this new law will help improve our system.”

“Preserving our planet for future generations should be one of our top priorities as lawmakers — and that’s why I sponsored the Senate version of this bill,” said Sen. Mona Das, D-Kent. “We know that our recycling practices and policies are changing, so we’re taking an innovative approach for planning for our future. This bill will help our state lead the nation in becoming greener and more sustainable.”

Other laws passed this session which help promote zero waste

It was a banner year for bills to help reduce waste and improve our recycling. New laws include:

- **Paint Stewardship:** Rep. Strom Peterson championed HB 1652 which will create a convenient, manufacture-run system that lets Washington residents and businesses recycle latex paint and safely dispose of oil paint, starting November 2020. Latex paint can easily be recycled into a suite of colors. GreenSheen, out of Colorado, has started operations in Kent, WA, where it will produce high quality recycled latex paint that is sold at Habitat for Humanity and other stores for about half the price of new paint. Oil paint will be offered for reuse or will be disposed of as hazardous waste. For more info, please see this release: <http://productstewardship.net/news/washington-enacts-law-creating-new-paint-recycling-program>
- **Compostability labeling:** HB 1569, led by Rep. Bill Ramos, D- Issaquah, requires that compostable products must meet compostability standards and be clearly labeled. All those products with misleading claims on their packaging such as “biodegradable,” “decomposable,” “oxo-degradable,” etc. will not be allowed to be sold in Washington. Compostable utensils and film bags must be green or brown tinted if they are compostable and may not be green or brown if they are not.
- **Food waste:** Right now, 17% of what we send to the landfill in Washington is food waste, and about half of that is edible food. HB 1114, championed by Rep. Beth Doglio, D-Olympia, sets a goal to reduce our food waste by 50% by 2030. It also requires an evaluation of the state’s food waste and wasted food management system and improved diversion of inedible food for composting, agriculture and other uses.

For more information about zero waste bills introduced and/or passed into law in the 2019 Washington legislative session: <https://zerowastewashington.org/legislative-work/>

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