



FlashReport Weblog on California Politics



[The Toxic Truth About The Los Angeles County Supervisors' Ban On Plastic Bags](#)

[« Back to All Posts](#)

by [Jon Fleischman](#) - Publisher

11-29-2010 7:26 am

Earlier this year Californians were saved from huge increases in their grocery bills when the state legislature [failed to approve AB 1998](#), legislation that would have banned plastic bags and charged a fee for paper bags. AB 1998 was ill-conceived legislation [about which I wrote](#) when it was before the legislature. Residents of unincorporated areas of Los Angeles weren't so lucky. Just two weeks ago the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors [approved a ban on plastic bags](#).

Banning plastic bags is the latest crusade for environmentalists hell-bent on saving the planet—even if the science behind their cause is questionable and the consequences are far worse than the minimal plastic bag waste they think is destroying the environment.

In fact, the day before the Board of Supervisors passed their ban, New York U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer—certainly a traditional ally of environmentalists—[sent a letter](#) to the Food and Drug Administration demanding an investigation and outright ban of the very reusable bags being promoted as a safer alternative to plastic bags.

Schumer's dramatic condemnation of reusable bags was prompted by a startling

[Tampa Tribune](#)

[investigation](#) that found toxic levels of lead in the reusable bags being sold at local grocery chains. The levels were so dangerous, they exceeded what the Environmental Protection Agency would find acceptable for disposal in landfills. Exposure to lead is known to cause neurological damage in children and infertility among adults.

So scandalous is the toxic lead report that even California politicians are distancing themselves from the potential public outcry about forcing the use of lead-tainted bags instead of plastic bags. Democrat Assemblyman Kevin de Leon, whose district is within Los Angeles, submitted a letter on November 15th requesting the Board of Supervisors delay its vote because of the recent revelations about potentially toxic levels of lead in reusable bags.

He questioned whether the bags could contaminate the food that consumers transport and whether the lead could be spread in landfills when the bags are discarded. De Leon even admitted that he is a "co-author and long-time advocate of legislative proposals to ban plastic bags from the stream of commerce."

De Leon was in fact a [co-author of AB 1998](#), the legislation introduced by Assemblywoman Julia Brownley last year that would have imposed a statewide ban on plastic bags and encouraged the use of reusable bags by also imposing a hefty per-bag fee on paper grocery bags.

In response to the new revelations about toxic levels of lead in reusable bags, Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas [proposed an amendment](#) to the Los Angeles plastic bag ban that specifically addressed the issue. "Reusable bags should not contain levels of lead, cadmium or heavy metals in toxic amounts, as defined by applicable State and Federal standards and regulations for packaging or reusable bags."

Ridley-Thomas' amendment is merely grandstanding for an alarmed public. Passing an amendment to try and make a bad law better won't fix the potential health problems caused from use of the lead-tainted bags. While the amendment calls for bags to be in compliance with state and federal standards for heavy metal toxicity, the truth is California has exempted reusable bags from those very standards. And the politician who authored that exemption is the same person who tried to ban plastic bags this year: Assemblywoman Julia Brownley.

Ignoring warnings about potential public health issues and environmental damage from lead-tainted reusable bags is just one example of Supervisors' irresponsible failures to do their homework before passing the plastic bag ban. They also rushed into their vote without consulting lawyers about the potential impact Proposition 26 may have on the ban.

Passed less than a month ago, Proposition 26 requires all fees to gain 2/3 approval of their voters before they are levied on the public. A ten cent per bag fee certainly falls within that category. Proponents of the fee will argue that because it is collected and retained by stores it's not a government fee. But it's the government that's forcing stores to stop providing complimentary plastic bags for their customers and then charge the ten cent fee for paper bags.

The Board of Supervisors vote was 3-1, with Michael Antonovich—the lone voice of reason—casting the dissenting vote. In an [exclusive column](#) for the FlashReport, Antonovich explained there were many reasons to oppose the ban, including the tax increase, the disproportionate impact on low-income citizens, the possible health issues, the burden on businesses and the simple fact that it's bad public policy. Supervisor Antonovich understands that if citizens are educated, they don't need government to make decisions for them: "We need a more engaged and educated citizenry to protect our environment, instead of draconian decision making."

It's tragic that the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors hastily approved the ban on plastic bags when there are two very serious issues that haven't been addressed. They've forced their constituents into the untenable position of being forced to use potentially health-damaging bags simply to be politically correct. And they wasted taxpayer dollars by passing a fee that violates Proposition 26.

Los Angelinos deserve better.



Comments

There are no comments.

Post a Comment

Not Registered Yet? [Click Here](#)

Forgot your Password? [Click Here](#)

Want to update your settings? [Click Here](#)

You must have a [MyFlashReport Account](#) to Comment.