



# Forget the Bag Tax – Push in NJ to Ban Plastic Bags, Straws

Dino Flammia, August 23, 2018

If you were dreading the idea of paying 5 cents for every paper or plastic bag you use, we have some good news and some bad news for you.

The good news: Gov. Phil Murphy is rejecting the legislative proposal on his desk that would have implemented the fee for single-use bags. A veto is expected soon.

The bad news: The move likely paves the way for an all-out ban on plastic bags and other waste considered hazardous to the environment and even our health.

State Sen. Bob Smith, D-Middlesex, who announced Murphy's intentions during a joint legislative hearing on plastics in Toms River, said his "ban bill" could see legislative action as early as mid-September.

"We will be working hard this fall on plastics legislation," Smith said after the hearing. "But we're going to take plenty of testimony. We want to hear from the people of New Jersey. We're not jamming anything down anybody's throat."

His measure, introduced in June, prohibits the distribution of plastic carryout bags, Styrofoam, and single-use plastic straws.

Since the bag-fee measure was sent to Murphy in late June, municipalities throughout New Jersey — mostly along the shore — have been racing against the clock to get their own

version of a fee or ban law in place. The bill would have prohibited any new local ordinances once it was signed into law.

A spokesperson for the Governor's Office confirmed an absolute veto of the bag-fee bill will occur "in the coming days."

"We were actually calling for an outright veto because it wasn't worth tinkering with what existed," said Amy Goldsmith, New Jersey State Director for Clean Water Action. "It set the course for the dialogue, but it didn't set the course for what the policy should be for the state."

Environmental groups have been pushing for a "hybrid bill," featuring a ban on plastic bags and a fee on paper bags. Smith said he may add a fee for paper to his legislation.

According to Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, bans on plastic bags have proven to be effective in other parts of the country. The fees "don't work," he said, claiming customers end up getting used to paying a little extra for each bag.

"Sometimes a veto is a good thing because that bill was a bad bill," Tittel said.

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline, Convenience Store and Automotive Association, said while plastic waste is undoubtedly an issue, banning plastic bags is not the solution — it's people who fail to recycle.

"If we were properly disposing and recycling and we had been doing this all along, we would all be enjoying this day at the beach in Ocean County today; we wouldn't be here," Risalvato told legislators.