



News from Conaway & Conners 7th Legislative District



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CONAWAY/CONNERS PROPOSE RECYCLING, PHASE OUT OF PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS

*Assemblymen Say New Bill Would Conserve Energy, Protect Marine Life,
Safeguard Environment*

(TRENTON) – Assemblymen Herb Conaway M.D., and Jack Conners today formally introduced legislation to crack down on the proliferation of non-biodegradable plastic shopping bags through mandatory in-store recycling programs for retail outlets with a minimum 10,000 square feet of space and a three-year phase out of plastic bags by New Jersey retailers.

Entitled the “Plastic Bag Recycling Act,” the Conaway/Conners bill (A-4555) would make New Jersey the first state in the country to eventually ban plastic grocery bags.

The lawmakers said the bags are bad for the environment.

“We need to get these bags out of the waste stream because they are polluting our soil and our water,” said Conaway (D-Burlington, Camden). “Plastic bags may be cheap and convenient, but they have costly long-term environmental consequences that just can’t be ignored.”

“These bags clutter landfills, they blow around in trees, they clog drains, and they float into waterways where they harm marine life,” said Conners (D-Camden, Burlington). “The statistics on the number of these bags entering the environment are absolutely staggering.”

According to the bill, an estimated 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are used worldwide, which is over 1 million bags per minute. It’s estimated that billions of plastic bags end up as litter each year. Unlike paper bags, non-biodegradable plastic bags take longer to deteriorate in the environment and kill countless animals and marine life. The production of plastic bags consumes over 12 million barrels of oil worldwide each year. Plastic bags – introduced in 1977 – now account for 90 percent of grocery bags in the United States.

(MORE)

The Conaway/Connors measure would require supermarkets and retailers with over 10,000 square feet of retail space to provide easily accessible bins for collecting plastic bags, which could then be recycled. Owners and operators of stores with less than 10,000 square feet of space may voluntarily comply with the recycling objectives of the bill, but they are not required to do so.

Additionally, the bill would require applicable retailers to provide shoppers with the opportunity to purchase reusable bags. A plastic bag provided by a store would need to have the following words: “Please return this plastic bag to a participating store for recycling.”

Plastic bag manufacturers, meanwhile, would be required to develop educational materials to encourage the reduction, reuse and recycling of plastic bags and to make the materials available to retailers.

Under the measure, retail stores would need to reduce their use of plastic bags by 50 percent by December 31, 2009 and eliminate their use entirely by December 31, 2010.

In March, San Francisco became the first city in the U.S. to pass a law banning the use of plastic bags from large supermarkets. In July, the state of California enacted a law that requires large stores to take back plastic bags and encourage their reuse. The New York City Council also has introduced legislation calling for the recycling of plastic bags.

Several countries have taken initiatives to cut down the use of plastic bags. In 2002, Ireland introduced a tax on plastic bags, reducing their use by 90 percent. Some communities in Australia have banned them in retail stores since 2003.