

Why Reducing Single-Use Plastics and Packaging Is Beneficial for Cities

The Legislature is currently considering two identical bills, [SB 54 \(Allen\)](#) and [AB 1080 \(Gonzalez\)](#), that seek to have *producers* source reduce the amount of single-use plastic products and packaging and make those products and packaging recyclable or compostable by 2030. If made into law, these bills would take significant steps towards moving California towards a more recyclable economy and address the issues facing cities over the collapse of recyclable material markets.

The Collapse of the Recycling Market in California

California's solid waste and recycling industries are facing a series of critical issues. First among these challenges are changes in China's trade import policies. These changes, collectively referred to as "National Sword," have significantly disrupted California's recycling industry by restricting foreign imports of recyclable materials and increasing the requirements that aim to reduce contamination levels in recycling streams.

International markets have served as a key component of California's recycling infrastructure. Since the change in China's policy, California has seen the market for recycled materials dry up. These materials, including plastics and paper, are piling up at local waste facilities across the state with no place to go. This has caused increased costs to local governments, a loss in a once stable revenue stream, slowdowns in waste processing of other materials, and public health risks.

Prior to 2017, cities often sold their recyclable materials to a third party, which generated revenue for the city. Now with the collapse of recyclable material markets, cities are forced to pay for the disposal of these materials or have to raise their solid waste and recycling rates to offset the increased costs.

Source Reduction Reduces Waste to our Landfills

In addition to the increasing cost of disposal of these materials, local governments in California annually spend in excess of four hundred twenty million dollars (\$420,000,000) in ongoing efforts to clean up and prevent plastic and other litter from entering our rivers and streams and polluting our beaches and oceans. By having producers source reduce the amount of plastic waste that enters into municipal waste streams, cities can save money on collecting and processing these materials, while also helping the environment.

Local governments are statutorily responsible for ensuring that California achieves its recycling and waste management goals. These bills would aid cities in reaching these goals by reducing waste at its source before it can reach local landfills and recycling centers; or worse our beaches and other beautiful natural environments.

For these reasons, the League, along with over 30 cities, are supporting these bills. By reducing the amount of single-use plastic products and packaging produced in California, SB 54 and AB 1080 will help protect the environment, save local governments money, and increase marketability for recyclable materials by reducing containments.