News Release
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VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE REJECTS TAX ON PLASTIC, PAPER BAGS

Move Follows Last Week’s Defeat of Proposal to Outlaw Plastic Bags

ARLINGTON, VA (February 9, 2010) – A Virginia legislative panel today rejected a proposal to levy a new tax on shoppers who accept plastic or paper carryout bags from retailers. A House Finance subcommittee tabled HB1115, a bill that would have required shoppers to pay a five-cent tax for each carryout bag received from a wide spectrum of shopping venues, including grocers, pharmacies and department stores.

Virginia legislators last week set aside a related proposal to outlaw plastic retail bags.

Virginia is the latest state to reject taxes or bans on plastic carryout bags. Earlier this year, California legislators rejected a bill to impose a twenty-five cent tax on plastic bags. Seattle voters late last year overwhelmingly rejected a bag tax because most residents considered it unnecessary since they were already reusing and recycling their plastic bags. In January, Washington, D.C., began implementing the only bag tax in the nation, which reportedly has been met with indignation by many District residents.

“Most public officials have determined that a new tax is not the most effective approach to combat litter – and that recycling works,” said Shari Jackson of the American Chemistry Council’s Progressive Bag Affiliates (PBA), representing America’s leading makers and recyclers of plastic bags. Jackson noted there are widespread opportunities in Virginia to recycle plastic bags and product wraps.

"Building on existing programs, new bag recycling efforts are underway in Virginia," Jackson said, “so shoppers can return plastic bags that aren’t being reused to most large grocery stores and other drop-off sites for recycling – along with dry-cleaning bags, newspaper bags and plastic wraps from bread, paper towels, cases of soda and more. This valuable material is in demand to make things like durable backyard decking, home-building products, city park benches and new plastic bags.”

PBA continues to ask policy makers to focus on recycling education and encouraging shoppers to reduce, reuse and recycle their plastic bags. “Instead of raising taxes, public officials can help get the word out so shoppers bring plastic bags and product wraps back to stores,” Jackson said. U.S. EPA data show that plastic bags were recycled at a rate of 12 percent nationally in 2007, and that number is expected to continue to grow as more states and localities adopt policies to encourage the recycling of plastic bags and product wraps.
In addition to recycling, national surveys have found that more than 90 percent of consumers reuse plastic retail bags at home for things like lining their waste baskets, packing their kids’ lunches and cleaning up after their pets.

About the Progressive Bag Affiliates
The Progressive Bag Affiliates of the American Chemistry Council promote the responsible use and recycling of plastic bags. The PBA recycling toolkit is being used by retailers around the nation as a reference for determining the best ways to deploy effective recycling solutions in stores. To learn more about increasing plastic bag recycling, please visit www.plasticbagrecycling.org.

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