

# California Signs New Plastics Law

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After leading the nation in banning plastic bags, California recently enacted sweeping legislation that requires a reduction in the amount of plastic produced and used in the state. The law is the first of its kind.

In the US, efforts to limit plastic waste have been inconsistent. A handful of states have banned or imposed a fee for plastic shopping bags, and some have banned foam food containers. That said, many of these laws were not enforced when the pandemic increased the demand for single-use plastics. Indeed, California briefly suspended its ban on single-use plastic shopping bags to curb the spread of Covid-19. The law has since been reinstated and supplemented by the Plastic Pollution Prevention and Packaging Producer Responsibility Act.

California's new law has four main prongs:

1. **Reduction.** The law requires a 25 percent reduction of plastics in single-use products, including single-use plastic bags, in California by 2032. The reduction can be achieved by shrinking the size of packaging or using refillable containers or packaging made from other materials, such as recyclable paper or aluminum. The reductions are projected to eliminate approximately 23 million tons of single-use plastics over the next decade.
2. **Recycling.** The law also requires 30 percent of plastic to be recycled by 2028, increasing to 65 percent by 2032. If producers are unable to meet the required recycling rates, plastic will be banned entirely.
3. **Donation.** The law further requires the plastics industry to create a \$5 billion fund over the next decade to help low-income communities impacted by the effects of plastic pollution.
4. **EPR.** Finally, the law transfers the cost of recycling from taxpayers to the plastics industry.

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This policy, called Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), is already successfully in effect in Oregon, Maine, Colorado, Canada, and the European Union.

The new law is expected to prompt a nationwide change in the plastics industry, as companies are likely to adapt to California's standards regardless of whether their products are also sold elsewhere. Retailers should be looking for ways to achieve the reduction and recycling requirements of the new law and provide the appropriate products to customers.

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