

# Rules changing for plastic bags, regulator advises

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SANTA BARBARA, CALIF. (Dec. 9, 3:10 p.m. ET) -- Extruders of plastic bags may need to change the way they do business, according to California state regulator Gary Petersen, who suggests reusable bags are the wave of the future.

"One-way bags are probably history," said Petersen, the environmental member of the California Integrated Waste Management Board since 2005 and chair of the board's market development and sustainability committee.

Petersen recognizes that developments in the 2009 California legislative session may add to headaches for resin processors and their backers. Litter is the Achilles' heel, and the plastics industry's push for more recycling programs and citizen accountability is wearing thin with officials, Petersen said in a telephone interview from his Santa Barbara office.

"What else in the packaging world ends up in the ocean?" he asked.

In California, a mandatory at-store program for recycling plastic grocery and merchandise bags went into effect July 1, 2007.

Other producer-responsibility bills involving polystyrene food containers, plastic beverage holders, one-way bags and rigid plastic packaging came close to passing in the legislature this year and might make it through next time. "Things will be different in 2009," Petersen predicted.

In San Pedro, Calif., members of the California Ocean Protection Council unanimously adopted Nov. 20 a nonbinding strategy for dealing with ocean litter. However, elements of the strategy are "out there for possible legislation," Petersen said. The proposals include imposing fees on single-use plastic and paper bags and totally banning expanded and clear forms of PS containers, cups and other take-out packaging.

COPC wants a take-back program for convenience-food packaging. The so-called extended producer responsibility program "would require businesses that place packaging materials into the stream of commerce to be responsible for recovering those materials once they have been used," the COPC strategy says, citing as an example Germany's green-dot program for cutting packaging waste.

Local jurisdictions are tired of paying for the cleanup of plastic debris, and many communities — including several in California and 30 in Alaska — are imposing fees or bans on plastic bags, he noted.

"The industry has to think about where it is going and how to be responsible for what it does," Petersen said. "I want to try to help them retool" into a less-threatened market such as reusable bags.

He shared some of his thoughts with members of the California Film Extruders and Converters Association at a Nov. 19 meeting in Norwalk, Calif.

Petersen established Environmental Problem Solving Enterprises Corp. in 1997 and serves as president. The Santa Barbara-based firm focuses on advancing environment-friendly products and services such as cleaner fuels, green technologies and sustainable design and development.

From 1972-88, he operated Ecolo-Haul Recycling, which Waste Management Inc. acquired. He was a WM vice president and director of environmental affairs for WM's Recycle America program through 1997.