

---

## Plastic Ban Seems Unlikely, For Now Anyway

Contributed by Marjorie Holt  
Wednesday, February 17 2010

Home Weather

Wednesday, February 17th, 2010 | Posted by News Service of Florida Plastic Bag Ban Seems Unlikely, For Now Anyway

An effort to lift a statewide moratorium that prevents local governments from banning plastic grocery bags appears unlikely to be successful during the current legislative session.

Tough economic times, industry efforts and a desire for a statewide approach appear to be too formidable to overcome as lawmakers struggle to reach a goal of 75 percent recycling by 2020.

Still, the chairman of the Senate Environmental Preservation Committee on Tuesday urged Florida's business community to take the lead in reducing the use of non-degradable plastic grocery bags or face the potential of statewide or local restrictions on their use.

"If we're going to interfere with local government and say you can't do it, it's incumbent upon us to have a plan of action that includes (the business lobby) AIF, the Retail Federation and others saying what we want to do and not what we don't want to happen," said Sen. Lee Constantine, R-Altamonte Springs.

Prompted by attempts from local governments to ban the use of plastic bags at supermarkets and other retailers, lawmakers in 2008 placed a statewide moratorium on local officials from moving on the issue. The ban came at the behest of retailers concerned that a piecemeal approach would be expensive, ineffective and difficult to comply with.

Americans used almost 90 billion retail bags in 2003, according to a Department of Environmental Protection study released Feb. 1. Most were used once and then ended up in landfills or on the side of the road.

The report didn't call for lawmakers to take any specific action, but rather laid out the pros and cons of several possible ideas for reducing the number of plastic bags that end up in landfills. Some environmentalists had hoped DEP would recommend a ban, or at least a fee meant to curb the use of the bags.

Retailers say there is an increasingly aggressive education effort to change consumer behavior. Incentives, refunds and

other education programs are being pursued.

“There is a temptation to think that if government is not doing something, it is not being done,” said Samantha Hunter Padgett, deputy general counsel for the Florida Retail Federation. “That is not the case.”

Constantine said private industry must be the driving force behind efforts to change consumer habits. Though the severity of the problem may be debated, plastic grocery bags represent a significant waste stream that will have to be part of any comprehensive waste management and reduction effort.

“I’m not looking for mandates, I’m looking for solutions,” Constantine told several industry officials at the committee’s meeting Tuesday. “But I need your help.”

A bill has yet to be filed and Constantine said he expects a recycling bill to be ready for session. It may not however, include a plastic bag provision.

Other panelists said Tuesday they would have a hard time voting for measures that would increase costs to businesses. Sen. Nancy Detert, R-Venice, said it also may take consumers a little more time to catch on.

“There’d be screaming in the stores if you had to pay or bring your own bag,” said Sen. Nancy Detert, R-Venice.