

authorization level, federal funding would be \$778 million annually.

According to the Matsui-Shimkus letter, as of June 1, eight other congressmen, from both parties, had signed the letter, including Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Henry Waxman (D-Calif.).

Signers of the industry-environmental letter included the Engine Manufacturers Association, the Clean Air Task Force, the California Farm Bureau, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Georgia Mining Association, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Sierra Club, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

By STEVEN D. COOK

Solid Waste

Growing Number of Localities Considering Fees for Plastic, Disposable Shopping Bags

The District of Columbia appears poised to join a growing number of municipalities aiming to reduce the use of disposable bags from grocery stores and other retailers.

On June 2, a committee of the D.C. Council approved legislation that would ban the use of “disposable, non-recyclable plastic carryout bags” and establish a 5-cent-per-bag fee on disposable carryout bags—paper or plastic—provided by grocery stores, drug stores, liquor stores, restaurants, and food vendors. The full council will vote on the bill June 16, and Mayor Adrian Fenty is expected to sign it.

The bill states that District residents receive an estimated 270 million disposable bags annually from groceries, convenience stores, drugstores, and liquor stores. Experience with other jurisdictions and stores indicates that the bill could reduce that number by up to 90 percent over the next four years, according to the city’s chief financial officer.

To date, the largest municipality to introduce a ban on the use of plastic bags is San Francisco, where the ban at grocery stores went into effect in March 2008. The ban applies to grocery stores and chain drug stores, said Mark Westlund, a spokesman for the city’s Environment Department.

“So far, so good,” he said, adding that he has received just one complaint, from a person who was caught in the rain with a paper bag. San Francisco chose to ban the bags after an initial effort to survey bag usage fell apart in 2004 and 2005, Westlund said, but estimates were that city stores were distributing 150 million plastic bags per year.

Results So Far More Anecdotal Than Scientific. Results of the ban so far have been more anecdotal than scientific, Westlund said. But there have been fewer incidents of bags wrapping around machinery at the city recycling center, there is less contamination of the compost stream, and, from his office, he can see no bags caught in the branches of trees.

The city has not yet conducted quantitative studies on the ban’s effects, but Westlund told BNA that retailers have indicated that 30 percent to 50 percent of customers are bringing their own canvas bags to stores.

Los Angeles voted in May to ban plastic bags from stores starting in July 2010. Consumers will have the

option after that date to pay 25 cents for a paper or biodegradable bag.

Other large cities, such as New York, are considering attaching fees to bags (218 DEN A-3, 11/12/08).

In Seattle, the city tried to impose a 20-cent fee on the bags, but after a petition drive, voters will take up the issue in a referendum later this year.

Movement at State, Federal Level. Though the most successful efforts to ban or tax disposable carryout bags have been local, 23 states have considered more than 70 bills or resolutions relating to plastic bags in the last two years. Most of those bills involve a combination of banning one-time-use bags and imposing a fee on their use, and many also require stores to establish in-store recycling or collection programs. The California Senate passed a bill June 1 requiring plastic-bag manufacturers to develop educational materials to encourage reducing, reusing, and recycling of plastic bags.

There also has been legislative action on the federal level. In April, Rep. James Moran (D-Va.) introduced a bill that would impose a tax on single-use carryout bags.

The Plastic Bag Reduction Act of 2009 (H.R. 2091) would impose a 5-cent tax on grocery sacks, dry-cleaning bags, and takeout food bags between Jan. 1, 2010, and the end of 2014, and a 25-cent tax on the bags after Jan. 1, 2015. The tax would be passed through to the customer and would appear separately on the receipt of sale provided to the customer. A portion of the tax would be returned to stores that have bag-recycling programs.

Moran’s bill was referred to the House Ways and Means and Natural Resources committees.

Responsible Bag Use. Amid the buzz regarding banning the use of plastic bags, bag manufacturers and recyclers have stepped in to assert that plastic bags can be used responsibly.

Shari Jackson, director of the Progressive Bag Affiliates of the American Chemistry Council, said the bags can be recycled into anything from outdoor decking and fencing to shopping carts, pipes, and bags.

In April, the Progressive Bag Affiliates announced an initiative to achieve 40 percent recycled content in all plastic bags by 2015. The group said the move would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 463 million pounds, conserve enough energy to heat 200,000 homes, and reduce waste by 300 million pounds every year (75 DEN A-10, 4/22/09).

The key, said Jackson, is education. People need to be made aware of in-store bag recycling programs, which are the primary method of recycling available in most communities.

“This is the best mechanism that we know of right now,” she said. Some municipalities allow curbside recycling of plastic bags, but those are few and far between. She said the group is working with state and local governments, as well as retailers, to educate the public about recycling opportunities.

D.C. Council Tries to Avoid Pitfalls. The apparent success of the plastic bag bill in Washington is the result, said ban sponsor Councilman Tommy Wells, of collaboration with business as well as environmentalists. Wells said he researched legislation nationwide in crafting the bill and tried to avoid pitfalls other municipalities have encountered. The fact that the fee applies to paper as

well as plastic carryout bags is a result of the fact that paper bags cost the stores more money. To simply ban plastic bags would mean consumers would all use paper bags, which could hurt business, he said.

The bill also would establish a fund that would distribute reusable bags to food banks, seniors, and others on fixed incomes.

"That's the group that people in the plastics industry say we're hurting with this ban," he said.

BY CHARLOTTE E. TUCKER

Text of San Francisco's legislation is available at <http://www.municode.com/Resources/gateway.asp?pid=14134> and click on "Plastic Bag Reduction Ordinance."

More information on bag recycling is available at <http://www.plasticbagrecycling.org/plasticbag/index.html>.

Oceans

Mid-Atlantic Governors Sign Agreement To Protect Coastal, Ocean Resources

ALBANY, N.Y.—The governors of five Mid-Atlantic states signed an agreement June 4 to establish the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean to work cooperatively on issues affecting the region's coastal and ocean resources.

The agreement establishes four main priorities for the council, including development of a regional approach to support "the sustainable development of renewable energy in offshore areas."

Other priorities include working collaboratively on the impact of climate change on ocean and coastal resources, promoting improvements in water quality, and coordinating the protection of habitats and sensitive areas.

The five states involved in the agreement are Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Virginia. The agreement was announced at a Mid-Atlantic Governors Ocean Summit at the Borough of Manhattan College in New York.

"A regional approach will foster a cooperative and constructive relationship among the states, avoiding unintentional conflicts between adjacent states managing shared resources," the agreement said.

"Greater coordination will lead to greater predictability and efficiency in regulatory processes. We will be positioned to take advantage of new opportunities to protect sensitive or unique offshore resources, or to sustainably develop the potential of our shared energy resources."

Other key points in the agreement include:

- Federal agencies with responsibilities for ocean resources will be asked "to participate as partners in our shared actions."

- A summit will be held within six months with the region's stakeholders.

- The council will review the agreement in the spring and identify any new issues for regional cooperation.

The agreement also establishes eight guiding principles that include developing a partnership with the federal government and stakeholders, promoting a re-

gional agenda on the federal level, and commitment to an ecosystem-based approach.

"By working together, our five states will build a solid foundation for promoting greater, more effective federal and private investment, and for generating more attention on priority issues for our states," the agreement said.

BY GERALD B. SILVERMAN

More information on the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean is available at <http://midatlanticocean.org/>.

Climate Change

French Minister Says U.S. Emissions Proposal 'Far Off Mark,' Warns of Border Carbon Tax

PARIS—Targets for emissions cuts in a climate and energy bill currently before the U.S. Congress fall far short of international levels considered the minimum to fend off catastrophic climate change, but France still hopes a compromise can be worked out in time for a climate summit in December, the country's junior environment minister said June 2.

In comments to a French Senate roundtable on environmental taxation, Chantal Jouanno, France's secretary of ecology, said the Waxman-Markey bill, approved May 21 by the House Energy and Commerce Committee, would reduce U.S. carbon dioxide emissions by only 8 percent by 2020 compared with 1990. That level is "clearly far off the mark" of 25 percent to 40 percent cuts from 1990 levels cited by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as necessary to avoid disaster, she said.

She suggested that France favors flexibility on certain details of target negotiations leading up to the 15th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Copenhagen in December.

However, she said France has drawn a line in the sand for the level of reductions and base year it will accept.

France supports establishing an EU border adjustment tax on imports if the talks in Copenhagen fail to produce an international agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol, she said. The tax would adjust imported products' prices to compensate for lack of a carbon tax during its manufacture.

Question of Base Years. Passed in 2008, the European Union's energy climate package commits EU member countries to reducing emissions 20 percent by 2020, compared with 1990 levels, but to raise that level to 30 percent if major emitters—particularly the United States and China—agree to match them (243 DEN A-1, 12/18/08).

The climate and energy bill introduced by Reps. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) and Edward Markey (D-Mass.) proposes a federal cap-and-trade system to cut U.S. greenhouse gas emissions 17 percent by 2020 and 83 percent by 2050, starting from a 2005 base year (104 DEN A-10, 6/3/09).

Jouanno said France had calculated the U.S. legislation actually would lead to an emissions reduction of