

California SB 343 - Governor Approved Truth in Labeling for Recyclable Materials Bill



On October 5, 2021 California State Governor Newsom signed SB 343 *Truth in Labeling for Recyclable Materials* bill. By January 1, 2024 the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery, is required to provide information to the public to evaluate whether a product or packaging is recyclable in the state.

This bill prohibits the use of the word “recyclable” on unrecyclable products. Specifically, the bill prohibits the use of the chasing-arrows symbol or other misleading statements that a material is recyclable, unless the product or packaging meets the criteria for statewide recyclability. CalRecycle will determine which materials are truly recyclable and will publish on its website a list of acceptable materials that may continue to have the chasing arrows symbol.

Background

Before 2017, the United States was sending 4,000 shipping containers full of waste to China each day, including two-thirds of California’s potentially recyclable materials. Exporting this material allowed cities and counties to keep it out of local landfills. This inaccurately inflated state recycling rates, as recyclers China and other countries picked out valuable material and dumped or burned the rest. Since 2018, China and other countries have refused to accept all but the most valuable material – collapsing the markets for plastic packaging that was previously considered recyclable.

This change has severely strained local waste collection systems. Without a willing buyer for most of the plastic material being produced, the costs associated with sorting and landfilling the waste falls to local jurisdictions and their ratepayers. Recent waste management rate increases in Sacramento and elsewhere have been attributed, at least in part, to this problem. A 2018 study by CalRecycle found that plastic bags, films, and wraps – despite being only 12% of the waste stream – were “the largest type of contamination in curbside recycling bins.” This flexible plastic material with limited market value interferes with recycling facility machinery and, as a contaminant, lowers the value of recyclable paper and cardboard.

The strain on local recycling and waste systems is compounded as most consumers lack a clear understanding on what is acceptable. Further confusing consumers is the plastic resin identification coding (RIC) system, which classifies plastic types by numbers one through seven displayed within the chasing-arrows symbol. The RIC system was designed as a method for waste facilities to properly sort plastics. Most consumers simply see the chasing arrows and assume a product can be recycled.

The Statewide Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling recently reported, “Since consumers equate the ‘recycle’ word and symbol with what is accepted in curbside recycling bins, the ‘recycle’ word and symbol must be reserved for materials which are accepted in curbside bins and do not cause contamination.”

Link to the bill:

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billHistoryClient.xhtml?bill_id=20210220SB343

How Does this Impact You? Contact Us to Discuss

If you have any comments and/or questions, please contact your customer service representative or email: cps.info@us.bureauveritas.com

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