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British Columbia News

Province approves local bans, takes action on plastics

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/23066>

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Richmond - Through new initiatives, the Government of British Columbia is taking action to prevent plastic waste from polluting communities, shorelines and ending up in landfills.

“People have been consistent and vocal about the need to take serious action now on plastic waste and pollution, and we have heard the message loud and clear,” said George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. “Even in the face of current economic downturns, local governments and businesses have told us they remain committed to preventing millions of single-use plastic products from damaging the environment, polluting B.C.’s waters, harming wildlife and increasing costs for taxpayers.”

As part of the new set of steps, the Province is moving to approve bylaws banning single-use plastics for the municipalities of Richmond, Victoria, Saanich, Tofino and Ucluelet, clearing the way for those communities to implement their bans. The Province will also consider other bylaws as they are submitted.

The Province is also laying the groundwork to allow local governments to ban certain types of plastic products. The Province is proposing to draft a new regulation under the Community Charter to allow local governments to ban single-use plastics, such as shopping bags, plastic straws and polystyrene foam take-out containers, without requiring provincial approval.

“Every measure that prevents plastic from entering our ocean or removes it from our coasts and ocean is important,” said Chloé Dubois, president, The Ocean Legacy Foundation. “Policy measures like these are a crucial next step. I am thrilled to see our coastal communities lead the way with single-use plastic bans, as well as provincial regulations and policy supporting these and other laudable efforts to help reduce the estimated eight million tonnes of plastic that, on a global scale, enter the world’s ocean each year.”

More than 35,000 responses to the CleanBC Plastic Action Plan engagement highlighted the need to move toward provincewide bans on certain products. The What We Heard report on the plan’s engagement is available online: <https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/plastics>

“We will develop a legal framework to allow for provincial bans on single-use items, such as straws, take-out containers, shopping bags and other priority items. As we initiate this work, we will continue to consult to make sure solutions are manageable, take into consideration economic recovery and are phased in practically,” Heyman said. “We will also ensure that specific products continue to be available to people who live with a disability or need them for health reasons. We will align our actions with federal government initiatives if they occur on a reasonable timeframe.”

In addition, the Province is expanding the number of single-use products to be recycled through industry-funded residential recycling programs, including plastic cutlery, sandwich bags, stir sticks and other items. Details on how residents can participate will be part of future consultations.

The ministry is also exploring adding recycling programs for materials such as mattresses, electric-vehicle batteries, propane canisters and more. It will also look to improve recycling of packaging in the industrial, commercial and institutional sector. Additionally, feedback is being sought on how to address lost fishing gear that pollutes oceans and shorelines. A policy intentions paper has been posted on government’s engagement website to give stakeholders and the public an opportunity to review and comment on the proposed changes.

Working with Encorp Pacific (Return-It), the ministry is introducing a minimum 10-cent deposit on all beverage containers. Also, for the first time, milk and milk-alternative containers are scheduled to be added to the deposit and refund system.

“The changes to the B.C. Recycling Regulation reinforce B.C.’s leadership in protecting the environment and extended producer responsibility performance in Canada,” said Allen Langdon, president and CEO, Return-It. “These changes provide additional incentives and we encourage all British Columbians to participate by returning their beverage containers for recycling to improve recovery and keep plastics and other beverage containers out of our landfills, oceans and waterways. We commend the B.C. Ministry of Environment for its leadership.”

The B.C. deposit-refund system has also been improved to allow for electronic refunds, making it even easier for British Columbians to recycle. As new cashless, low-touch Return-It Express systems continue to come online, consumers who drop off their tagged refundable beverage containers to select locations can have their refund processed electronically. Refunds can be sent to consumers’ bank accounts through e-transfer or donated to a community-based organization.

These changes support the Province’s CleanBC efforts to prevent plastic waste, divert more waste from landfills and create a cleaner, better future for everyone. These and future efforts are being guided by feedback received from British Columbians. They also reflect the feedback received by Sheila Malcolmson, Parliamentary Secretary of Environment, during engagement in her role as special advisor on marine debris and abandoned vessels.

“Last year, I toured many coastal communities to hear first-hand the challenges they are facing with marine debris, including plastics,” Malcolmson said. “Every person and organization I heard from, including local governments and First Nation communities, expressed their fears for the marine environment and their commitment to being part of the solutions.”

CleanBC is a pathway to a more prosperous, balanced and sustainable future. CleanBC was developed in collaboration with the BC Green Party caucus and Andrew Weaver, MLA for Oak Bay-Gordon Head, and supports the commitment in the Confidence and Supply Agreement to implement climate action to meet B.C.’s emission targets.

Quick Facts:

- B.C. is a leader in creating extended producer responsibility (EPR) recycling programs. It has more programs than any other jurisdiction in North America.
- B.C. has 22 industry-led EPR recycling programs covering 14 different product categories of consumer products, such as packaging, electronics and electrical products, residual solvents, beverage containers, tires and household hazardous wastes.
- 315,000 tonnes of plastics, such as those in electronics, beverage containers and other packaging, are already captured annually in B.C.’s EPR programs.
- Over the last 25 years, more than 20 billion beverage containers have been diverted from landfills and waterways in B.C.
- Including single-use and packaging-like products in the EPR system is expected to capture millions of single-use plastic items annually. These include items like plastic cutlery and cups and packaging bought for home use, such as plastic sandwich bags.

Learn More:

The CleanBC Plastics Action Plan What We Heard Report is now available: <https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/plastics>

Learn more about the industry-led blue box program: <https://recyclebc.ca/>

The intentions paper on proposals to regulate additional materials is available for public feedback: <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/recycling-regulation-policy-intentions-paper>

Learn more about the Return-It Express and depot/refund system: <https://www.return-it.ca/>

Learn more about the CleanBC Plastics Action Plan: <https://cleanbc.gov.bc.ca/plastics>

Learn about Malcolmson's work on marine debris: <https://gov.bc.ca/MarineDebrisProtection>

A backgrounder follows.

Media Contacts

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Backgrounders

What people are saying about municipal bylaws banning single-use plastics

Malcolm Brodie, mayor, City of Richmond –

“Richmond’s bylaw to ban single-use plastics and other items makes our community one of the leaders in preventing millions of plastic and foam items from entering landfills and waterways every year. Thanks to the input we received from business and community members through our extensive communication and engagement campaign last year, we know it’s important to work with business as part of creating and implementing the new ban. We will continue to identify and raise awareness about how each of us can reduce unnecessary waste. Given the current situation due to COVID-19 and the pressures the situation is posing on business, we will be assessing the timing of implementing of our bylaw.”

Lisa Helps, mayor, City of Victoria –

“It’s great to see the Province taking these important steps to give local governments more control over managing our waste streams for the benefit of the environment and our bottom lines. Victoria’s bylaw banning plastic bags was one of the first in the country. Thanks to its implementation, more than 17 million plastic bags stay out of the landfill annually. Victoria residents and businesses deserve a great deal of thanks for making the transition so seamless. In Victoria, we spend over \$5 million a year managing waste. Reducing the amount of plastic that goes into the landfill will save our residents and businesses money. Thanks to this provincial action, these new powers will allow the city to implement more zero-waste and circular-economy strategies.”

Fred Haynes, mayor, District of Saanich –

“Saanich has declared a climate emergency, and the elimination of checkout bags is an important step toward becoming more sustainable, reducing waste and respecting our natural environment. We want to do our part to ensure we are doing everything we can to protect our environment, both now and into the future. Reducing the negative impacts from discarded plastic bags is a small but significant step. We look forward to working with our residents and businesses to make this a reality.”

Josie Osborne, mayor, District of Tofino –

“We’ve heard loudly and clearly from West Coast residents, visitors and businesses that single-use plastic packaging has no place in our waste streams, our landfills or polluting local waters and beaches. Bringing a

municipal bylaw into force was the final step to phasing out items that we simply do not need, and we're excited to join a number of B.C.'s local governments that are working with their communities and with the Province to reduce the use of single-use plastics."

Mayco Noel, mayor, Resort Municipality of Ucluelet –

"This bylaw is an important step forward and we thank the Province for their support on this initiative. We are excited to continue the work with our provincial and regional partners and local businesses to reduce single-use item waste on the West Coast."