
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1031 (Blakespear) - Solid waste: compostable products

Version: April 16, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Policy Vote: E.Q. 5 - 2

Mandate: No

Consultant: Ashley Ames

Bill Summary: This bill would update compostable plastic labelling requirements so compostable plastics are distinguishable in the solid waste stream.

Fiscal Impact:

- The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) estimates one-time costs of about \$1 million and ongoing costs of at least \$625,000 annually (General Fund) to manage and implement the study required by this bill, including study design, contract oversight, interagency coordination, evaluation of findings, and preparation of biennial updates and the final report. OEHHA notes that ongoing contract funding is needed because the health effects of compostable plastics are an emerging issue with a sustained project timeframe. Ongoing contracting dollars would support sampling and assessment as research on compostable plastics evolves.

Background: There is no federal standard for the labeling and certification of compostable plastics. California, beginning January 1, 2026 requires that anything labeled compostable meet the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) requirements (in addition to the applicable ASTM specification). In order to be NOP certified, a product must be a) overseen by a USDA NOP-authorized certifying agent and b) produced without prohibited methods (including genetic engineering or ionizing radiation) and with allowed substances. For example, farmers growing organic crops can use allowed non-organic substances such as isopropyl alcohol but cannot use genetic engineering (Title 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 205.600).

SB 54 (Allen) requires 65% of all single-use plastic to be recyclable by 2032. Plastic producers can meet this target through source reduction, plastic recycling, or switching to a compostable alternative. Ideally, plastic producers would first reduce their plastic use as much as possible (source reduction). Next producers would switch to recyclable or compostable alternatives. For example, a producer could use compostable fiber products, such as cardboard packaging, instead of plastic, where possible. If the producer maintains plastic packaging, they could switch to a highly recyclable material (such as PET) or invest in infrastructure for harder-to-recycle plastics.

Under SB 54, plastic producers are responsible for ensuring there is a “responsible end market” for their recycled plastic products. As in, producers are not off the hook the moment a consumer puts their product into the recycling bin. Instead, producers must ensure the plastic becomes a new raw material which is not taken to a landfill, sold internationally, or downcycled.

However, plastic producers are *not* responsible for finding an end market for compostable alternatives. Therefore, even if compostable packaging is landfill bound, plastic producers can still reach their SB 54 requirements. If plastic producers switched to compostable fiber packaging, this might not be a problem. Fiber products have a responsible end market, either as recycled paper or as organic compost. However, some producers are making the switch to compostable plastic. Compostable plastics do not currently have a responsible end market. This means that compostable plastics could comply with the letter of SB 54 without achieving the spirit of it.

Challenges in California compostable market. According to the Senate Committee on Environmental Quality analysis, there are three major challenges to finding a responsible end market for compostable plastics in California: 1) Composters cannot distinguish between compostable and noncompostable plastics, 2) there are discrepancies between the realities of California composting with the ASTM requirement, and 3) California farmers do not want compostable plastics in their compost.

Proposed Law: This bill would:

1. Require products which meet the applicable ASTM standard specification and are labeled “compostable” to be reasonably distinguishable from a noncompostable product in solid waste processing facilities. Specifically, require the product to meet one of the following:
 - a. The product is uniformly green with the word “compostable” on one side with the lettering at least one inch tall; or
 - b. The word “compostable” is on both sides of the product with either green lettering that is at least one inch tall or at least one-half inch tall in a contrasting green band that is at least one inch tall.
2. Disallow the phrase “compostable except in California” from labeling.
3. Require OEHHA to conduct a study on the safety of degraded compostable plastics.

Related Legislation:

AB 1812 (Aguiar-Curry, 2026) would prohibit a person from selling a product in California labeled “compostable” that is wholly or partially made of plastic.

SB 1201 (Ting, Chapter 504, Statutes of 2021) prohibits the sale of a product labelled compostable unless it meets the applicable ASTM specification.

SB 567 (DeSaulnier, Chapter 594, Statutes of 2011) prohibits the sale of a compostable plastic bag unless it meets the applicable ASTM specification and follows specific labelling requirements.

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