

Date of Hearing: June 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

SB 1031 (Blakespear) – As Amended May 14, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 30-9

SUBJECT: Solid waste: compostable products

SUMMARY: Establishes labeling requirements for compostable plastics.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Until January 1, 2026, prohibits the sale or offering for sale of a product that is labeled with the term “compostable” or “home compostable” unless the product meets specified standards. (Public Resources Code (PRC) 42357)
- 2) On and after January 1, 2026, prohibits a product from being labeled “compostable” or “home compostable” unless it satisfies all of the following:
 - a) Is an allowable agricultural input under the requirements of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) National Organic Program (NOP);
 - b) Does not have a total organic fluorine concentration of greater than 100 parts per million, as specified;
 - c) Is labeled in a manner that distinguishes the product from a noncompostable product upon reasonable inspection by consumers and to help enable efficient processing by solid waste facilities; and,
 - d) Is designed to be associated with the recovery of desirable organic waste. (PRC 42357)
- 3) Authorizes the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) to grant an extension for up to five years to the requirement that compostable products be an allowable organic input under the requirements of the NOP if the product has, or will soon be, included as allowed on the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances or the product or substance has, or will soon be, included as an allowable organic input for compost. (PRC 42357)
- 4) Requires compostable bags, as specified, to be readily and easily identifiable from other plastic bags in a manner that is consistent with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims (Green Guides), as specified. (PRC 42357.5)
- 5) Defines “ASTM standard specification” as either the ASTM standard specification for labeling of plastics designed to be aerobically composted in municipal or industrial facilities (D6400), as published in 2019 or the ASTM standard specification for labeling of end items that incorporate plastics and polymers as coatings or additives with paper and other substrates designed to be aerobically composted in municipal or industrial facilities (D6868), as published in 2019. (PRC 42356)

- 6) Defines “product” as including, but not limited to, a consumer product; a package or packaging component; a bag, sack, wrap, or other thin plastic sheet film product; and, a food or beverage container or container component. (PRC 42356)
- 7) Requires CalRecycle to review the ASTM standards specified in PRC 42356 if they are revised, and, if the new standard is more stringent and more protective of public health, public safety, and the environment, to adopt the new standard, as specified. (PRC 42356.1)
- 8) Authorizes CalRecycle to adopt an existing standard other than the prescribed ASTM standard specifications if the standard meets specified requirements. (PRC 42356.2)
- 9) Requires CalRecycle to adopt regulations to establish a process and develop criteria for determining the types of food service packaging that are reusable, recyclable, or compostable. (PRC 42370.2)

THIS BILL:

- 1) Revises the labeling requirement for compostable products to specify that the labeling distinguishes the product from noncompostable products upon reasonable inspection by consumers and solid waste processing facilities during receiving and processing.
- 2) Allows the sale or offering for sale of products labeled “compostable” or “home compostable” if the plastic product meets specified ASTM standard specifications and is labeled in a manner that meets the following:
 - a) The product is uniformly green and is labeled with the word “compostable” on the side of the product, with the lettering being at least one inch in height; or,
 - b) The product displays the word “compostable” on both sides of the product and the label has either green colored lettering at least one inch in height or has lettering at least one-half inch in height with a contrasting green band that is at least one inch in height.
- 3) Requires the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) to conduct a study evaluating the health effects of degraded compostable plastics and their additives to evaluate toxicity characteristics and levels of compostable plastics that are not anticipated to cause or contribute to adverse health effects, or to identify data gaps that would need to be addressed to establish those levels. Requires OEHHA to provide biennial status updates that may contain a compilation of findings from the study into a report and post the final report on its website.

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, 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.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Organic waste recycling.** Nearly 40 million tons of waste are disposed of in California's landfills annually. Nearly half of those materials are organics (~48%). Organic waste includes food, yard, paper, and other organic materials. As that material decomposes in landfills, it generates significant amounts of methane, a potent greenhouse gas (GHG) with 84 times the climate impact as carbon dioxide. The Air Resources Board (ARB) states that about 20% of methane emissions in California comes from landfills.

SB 1383 (Lara), Chapter 395, Statutes of 2016, requires ARB to approve and implement a comprehensive short-lived climate pollutant (SLCP) strategy to achieve, from 2013 levels, a 40% reduction in methane, a 40% reduction in hydrofluorocarbon gases, and a 50% reduction in anthropogenic black carbon, by 2030. In order to accomplish these goals, the law specifies that the methane emission reduction goals include targets to reduce the landfill disposal of organic waste, including food, 50% by 2020 and 75% by 2025 from the 2014 level. SB 1383 also requires that 20% of edible food that would otherwise be sent to landfills is redirected to feed people by 2025.

To achieve this, California's waste management infrastructure is going to have to process and recycle much greater quantities of organic materials, involving significant investments in additional processing infrastructure. Organic waste is primarily recycled by composting the material, which generates compost that can be used in gardening and agriculture as a soil amendment and engineering purposes for things like slope stabilization. Composting operations in California range from large-scale commercial operations to onsite agricultural composting activities to backyards. Anaerobic digestion is also widely used to recycle organic wastes. This technology uses bacteria to break down the material in the absence of oxygen and produces biogas, which can be used as fuel, and digestate, which can also be used as a soil amendment. Tree trimmings and prunings can also be chipped or mulched and applied to agricultural land for beneficial use, known as land application.

- 2) **Determining compostability.** Compostable plastics are plastics that are designed to decompose under certain conditions. They can be fossil-fuel based or based on various "bio" materials, but essentially all compostable plastics include some amount of synthetic additives or include some percentage of fossil-based polymers. Prior to the state adopting standards in 2004, plastic with misleading claims of biodegradability and compostability were widely marketed to consumers, even though the material did not break down as claimed. Compostable materials are generally not recyclable and are instead a contaminant when mixed with recyclable plastic waste. Since 2004, the Legislature has enacted numerous bills that attempt to prevent misleading environmental marketing claims and ensure that the materials we use can be properly managed, including banning the use of terms like "biodegradable" for plastic products and requiring plastics labeled "compostable" to meet widely accepted standards for compostability.

ASTM is an international standards organization that develops and publishes consensus-based technical standards. ASTM standards include two for compostable plastics. For plastics designed to be composted in industrial compost facilities (D6400) and for paper and other products coated in plastic or other polymers designed to be composted in industrial compost facilities (D6868). The standards are intended to provide consistency and clarity for consumers and producers who want to ensure that their products are compostable; however,

the standards are imperfect. Composting technology has advanced significantly since their adoption, and material is processed more quickly, so many compostable items, like utensils, often have to be removed from the finished compost and landfilled. Composting is designed to manage organic waste, like yard clippings and leaves, and is not an ideal management option for plastic waste.

In recognition of the issues with the current ASTM standards, SB 1335 (Allen), Chapter 610, Statutes of 2018, which establishes reuse, recycling, and compost requirements for food packaging used in state facilities, also required CalRecycle to adopt regulations to create standards for those terms. For composability, CalRecycle regulations require that the packaging must meet the ASTM standards D6400-19 or D6868-19, demonstrate 90% biodegradation within 60 days, and comply with related statutory requirements to be labeled “compostable” in the state.

Pursuant to AB 1201 (Ting), Chapter 504, Statutes of 2021, the sale of offering for sale any product in the state that is labeled “compostable” or “home compostable” is prohibited unless it meets specified requirements, including that, beginning January 1, 2026, the product is an allowable organic input under the NOP. This law additionally granted the director of CalRecycle the authority to issue an extension on this requirement for up to five years if the director determines that the product or substance is, or will soon be, an allowable organic input for compost. Last year, industry groups representing the compostable plastics industry requested that CalRecycle issue such an extension, which was granted by the director until June 30, 2027.

- 3) **SB 54.** SB 54 (Allen), Chapter 75, Statutes of 2022, requires the development of a circular economy program for packaging and plastic foodware in the state. The law requires that producers meet ambitious recycling, composting, and source reduction targets through the creation of a producer responsibility organization, and to achieve specified source reduction requirements for plastic covered materials. The recycling and compostability requirements increase from 30% by 2028 to 65% by 2032, and source reduction requirements increase from 10% by 2027 to 25% by 2032.

Under SB 54, plastic producers are responsible for ensuring there is a “responsible end market” for their recycled plastic products to ensure that the plastic is used in a new product and 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 meet their SB 54 requirements even though compostable plastics do not currently have a responsible end market. This means that single-use plastic products made from compostable plastics could be in compliance with the letter of SB 54 without meeting the spirit of the law.

- 4) **Federal standards.** Unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce are illegal under federal law. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) publishes the Green Guides to explain how the law applies to environmental labeling, advertising, and marketing, including the use of labels such as “degradable,” “biodegradable,” or “compostable.”

The USDA’s NOP requirements prohibit compostable plastic as a feedstock for compost that can be used on organic crops. In 2023, the Biodegradable Products Institute petitioned to revise the regulations to allow their use under the NOP. After a multi-year review of the

petition and the associated science, the National Organics Standards Board unanimously rejected the petition in January of this year, finding that “synthetic compostable materials” do not meet necessity, environmental and human health, and sustainable agriculture criteria for the inclusion. However, the action did leave the possibility open for future consideration of individual materials for narrowly-defined uses (e.g., collection bags, produce stickers, etc.).

- 5) **Where do they go?** Consumers should have confidence that the items they sort into their compost and recycling bins are composted or recycled. However, few composters in the state accept compostable plastics for composting. Instead, these items are generally screened out and landfilled to avoid contaminating the finished compost. When items labeled compostable end up in the recycling bin, they act as a contaminant in the recycling system and are also landfilled.
- 6) **Markets.** As noted above, the state generates massive quantities of organic waste, of which a substantial portion is managed by the state’s composters. The compost they produce is widely used in agriculture, landscaping, and other beneficial uses, but because of the quantities of organic waste that need to be managed, supply outpaces demand. The state’s composters actively pursue markets, and many local organics programs give away the finished compost for free to the communities they serve. For this reason, composters have an incentive to produce high-quality compost that is marketable to the state’s vibrant agricultural industry, which uses approximately two-thirds of the state’s compost. In order to do this, many composters work to maintain their organic eligibility. Even for those composters that don’t produce organic compost, compostable plastic items that end up in feedstock are often indistinguishable from conventional plastic. Rather than trying to sort compostable plastic from conventional plastic, most composters simply screen out all plastic prior to composting to avoid plastic contamination in the finished product.

According to the California Farm Bureau, compost is used as a soil conditioner, “sustainably improving the physical, chemical, and biological health of the soil, which leads to stronger crops and higher yields.” Compost reduces the need for synthetic fertilizers and both reduces water use and improves water retention in the soil. Farmers rely on the NOP label to ensure “quality and purity” of the compost they purchase. According to the Marin Carbon Project, the use of compost is a “triple win.” It increases carbon sequestration in the soil, mitigates emissions, and enhances the land’s resilience to extreme weather, such as flooding and drought.

- 7) **This bill.** This bill is intended to make compostable plastics easier to identify by waste processors, both recyclers and composters. Given the challenges associated with the management of compostable plastics and the lack of markets for nonorganic compost, it is not clear that increased labeling standards are necessary, or even beneficial. This provision is also in conflict with AB 1812 (Aguiar-Curry), which prohibits the sale of plastic products labeled compostable in the state.

This bill also requires OEHHA to study the health impacts of compostable plastics. There is very little information available about how compostable plastics behave in real-world compost operations, and even less on their potential health impacts. Having additional information about the health impacts would be helpful when establishing future state policies regarding their use.

Should this bill move forward, the author should coordinate with stakeholders, the relevant committees, and the author of AB 1812 to ensure that the bills are complimentary and do not undermine the goals of SB 1383 and SB 54.

8) Author's statement:

While compostable materials are often promoted as a sustainable alternative to conventional plastics, in practice they are frequently indistinguishable from traditional plastics, creating confusion for consumers and contamination challenges for composting facilities. As a result, many composters do not process them, undermining California's circular economy goals. To address this problem, SB 1031 establishes labeling requirements to ensure compostable products are clearly identifiable and reinforces product safety standards. The bill also directs the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) to study the breakdown, toxicity, and environmental public health impacts of compostable plastics.

- 9) Related legislation.** AB 1812 (Aguiar-Curry) would prohibit a person from selling a product in California labeled "compostable" that is wholly or partially made of plastic. This bill has been referred to the Senate Environmental Quality Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

350 Humboldt Grass Roots Climate Action
A Voice for Choice Advocacy
Climate Action California
Stopwaste

Opposition

California Manufacturers and Technology Association

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