

# New York just agreed to ban plastic bags. Is New Jersey next?

[Scott Fallon](#), North Jersey Record Published 6:30 a.m. ET April 4, 2019

New Jersey's efforts to ban plastic bags, straws and foam food containers has remained in legislative limbo for six months, with no action in Trenton on a bill championed by supporters as the strongest set of plastic regulations in the nation.

Now environmentalists hope New York's adoption this week of a ban on thin supermarket bags will help reinvigorate efforts in New Jersey to do away with products that make up a sizeable portion of pollution found in every corner of the Garden State.

New York's ban "takes away the idea that New Jersey would be the guinea pig for plastic bans on the East Coast," said Doug O'Malley, director of Environment New Jersey. "We're not California but there's a lot of DNA we share with New York. If they can do, so can we."

New York will become the third state after California and Hawaii to institute a ban of single-use plastic bags under an agreement made by lawmakers in the state budget approved Monday. The ban takes effect in March 2020.

And while the lack of progress in New Jersey has disappointed supporters, they say New York's ban is still critical to help reduce pollution in New Jersey because plastic bags easily travel between the two via wind and shared waterways like the Hudson River and New York Harbor.

Surrounded on three sides by water and sandwiched between New York and Philadelphia, New Jersey has been inundated with plastic pollution.

Plastics have made up the vast majority of trash collected each year from New Jersey's beaches by the advocacy group Clean Ocean Action. A 2016 report by NY/NJ Baykeeper estimated that about 165 million pieces of plastic float at any one time from Sandy Hook to the Tappan Zee Bridge along with several other waterways that make up the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary.

With more than a dozen New Jersey municipalities passing bans in recent years, the push for a statewide measure appeared to gain momentum last summer.

First, Gov. Phil Murphy vetoed a bill that would require a 5-cent fee on grocery store bags, signaling that he supported stronger measures. A month later, a bill — S2776 — that would ban bags, straws and polystyrene containers was approved by a Senate environment committee.

Since then, there has been little movement in a legislature that has tackled large-scale issues like the minimum wage, recreational marijuana, medically-assisted suicide and now the state budget.

The plastic bill's primary sponsor, Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex, said last summer that he expected the full legislature to take up the measure before the end of 2018. That did not happen.

The bill was sent in September to the Senate Appropriations Committee but no hearing has been held. An identical bill was introduced in the Assembly in July, but there has been no movement.

Smith and another primary sponsor, Assemblywoman Nancy Pinkin, D-Middlesex, did not return phone calls on Wednesday.