

California legislature takes on textiles

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Building on legislative work done as part of a landmark year for plastic and battery recycling in California, District 29 State Sen. Senator Josh Newman has introduced a bill to create a statewide collection and recycling program for textiles.

Under SB 707, producers of clothing and other textiles would be required to implement and fund an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program that would enhance recycling and increase reuse in the sector.

“Though many people don’t realize it, the clothing and fashion industry currently accounts for fully 10 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide output,” says Newman, Democrat from Fullerton, California. “The rise of ‘fast fashion,’ which revolves around the marketing and sale of low-cost, low-quality garments which tend to go out of style with increasing speed, threatens to have a long-lasting and devastating impact on our planet. By employing an EPR approach, SB 707 will enroll industry participants as partners and stewards to create an end-to-end framework that will reduce textile waste in California while supporting a second-hand clothing market that can continue to thrive.”

Each year, the average US consumer discards more than 81 pounds of clothing, an increase of 55 percent per capita since the year 2000. Despite the fact that 95 percent of the materials commonly found in textiles either are reusable or recyclable, the current share of used clothes and other textiles which are reused or recycled in the United States remains at approximately 15 percent.

“Textiles have been identified as a top material and the fastest growing category in residential and commercial waste streams in California. Local governments face costly challenges expanding textile collection and sorting since the materials can absorb, tangle and combust if mixed into plastic recycling systems,” California Product Stewardship Council Executive Director Doug Kobold says. “The cost burden for managing unusable textiles has fallen on thrifts, collectors and secondhand markets, while producers keep making products with no plan for what to do with them when they are no longer wearable. California continues to lead by holding producers accountable for planning and funding an ongoing repair and recycling program for managing unusable textiles and apparel.”

The fibers within most clothing items and textiles, if properly sorted and processed, are suitable for recycling and repurposing into new products. SB 707 would require producers to implement an end-to-end system to optimize the repair or recycling of textiles, including apparel, accessories, handbags, backpacks, draperies, shower curtains, furnishings, upholstery, bedding, towels, napkins and tablecloths.

Under this program, thrift stores and clothing collectors, which have long served as an effective second-hand market for textiles, would have an increased role as collection sites and also would be part of an integrated system for sorting and recycling used textiles that cannot be reused or resold.

“For more than 100 years, Goodwill has been a pioneer of sustainable fashion through the collection of secondhand goods, resale and recycling efforts,” says Nicole Suydam, president and CEO of Goodwill of Orange County and chair of the Goodwill Council of California Council. “My Goodwill colleagues across California and I look forward to working in partnership with Senator Newman and the California Product Stewardship Council to accelerate this important work and ensure a more sustainable future for all.”

A leader in recycling models and technologies, California has implemented a number of effective EPR programs that reduce waste and environmental harm by placing a shared responsibility for end-of-life product management on the producers and other entities involved across a product’s value chain. SB 707 would apply this proven model to facilitate a transition to a sustainable, market-aligned, circular economy for textiles that will unlock new production and consumption opportunities for the benefit of consumers, industry participants and the environment.