

SB Bill 1256 (Wieckowski)

PROPANE CYLINDER WASTE REDUCTION

BACKGROUND

Local government solid waste and recycling operations are responsible for the collection, processing, recycling, and disposal of various forms of waste. Local agencies and their contractors – funded by local ratepayers – are responsible for managing residential and commercial waste streams. Those waste streams include many items, some of which are easily and affordably managed and some of which are not. Some consumer products are expensive to process while others pose significant environmental, public health, or occupational safety and health concerns.

The legislature has grappled with how to best address the negative externalities of specific consumer products over the years – our state has producer-funded and run take-back programs for prescription and over-the-counter medications, sharps, mercury thermostats, and several other products that are funded by visible consumer fees. And, when appropriate, California has chosen to ban the sale of products. For example, mercury-added thermostats have been phased out in California since 2006.

PROBLEM

One consumer product that has been a longtime concern are the single-use 1lb propane cylinders typically used in camping stoves, lanterns, welding equipment, and more. It is estimated that between 40-60 million of these single-use 1lb propane cylinders are sold in the United States every year. California accounts for roughly 12% of the population of the United States, so we can safely estimate that somewhere between 4.8 and 7.2 million single-use 1lb propane cylinders are sold into California each year.

Under existing California law a consumer is legally permitted to dispose of an empty propane tank or cylinder in the curbside trash or recycling bin. However, if a propane tank or cylinder is not empty then it must be brought to a household hazardous waste facility. Unfortunately, empty or not, most of these cylinders are thrown into the trash, the recycling bin or left at campsites. Only about 1 million are collected and recycled through the Household Hazardous Waste programs offered by local governments. With an average per cylinder cost of \$3.00 for collection and proper recycling, that's a significant diversion of resources for such a small percentage of the waste stream.

Disposable propane cylinders are also problematic from a safety perspective. In most situations it is impossible to know whether a cylinder is completely empty. If a cylinder ends up at a Material Recovery Facility with complex machinery used to separate

materials, there is a risk of explosion that could cause injury to personnel or damage to infrastructure. This is part of what contributes to the cost of collecting and recycling these cylinders. In order to be safely recycled they must be evacuated and then punctured with special equipment to ensure that they are truly empty and safe for processing.

Local, state, and national parks have long struggled with the impacts of improperly disposed single-use 1lb propane cylinders. Yosemite's sustainability initiative includes a focus on reducing the improper disposal of propane cylinders. As a result, the only cylinders available for purchase inside of Yosemite are refillable.

SUMMARY

SB 1256 would ban the sale of single use 1lb propane cylinders in California beginning 1/1/2028. This would provide a five-year window in which consumers, retailers, and propane cylinder exchange programs can move to refillable 1lb propane cylinders.

The sales ban would be enforceable by a city attorney or county counsel, who would be empowered to impose a civil penalty of \$500 per day for the first violation, \$1,000 per day for the second violation, and \$2,000 per day for the third and subsequent violations. Enforcement would occur on the local level because, while the overall policy is a statewide concern, the negative impacts of violation fall squarely on local jurisdictions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Chris Clemons
Phone: (916) 651-4010
Email: Chris.Clemons@sen.ca.gov

SUPPORT

California Product Stewardship Council (Sponsors)

OPPOSITION

None on file.

STATUS

Introduced: 2/17/2022