



News Release



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Washington and Iowa find most reusable bags tested safe

OLYMPIA – Of 31 reusable shopping bags purchased from major retailers in the states of Washington and Iowa, only one bag was found to contain toxic metals above limits allowed by the states' laws. In addition, two bags had removable inserts that contained toxics. One bag and one insert came from Washington state. The second insert came from a bag purchased in Iowa.

Ecology partnered with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to purchase and screen reusable shopping bags for toxic metal content. Both states have legislation regulating toxics in packaging and both are members of the Toxics in Packaging Clearinghouse (Clearinghouse). The sampling was in response to recent concerns raised in the media about reusable bags.

Brian Tormey, Bureau Chief of Land Quality, Department of Natural Resources in Iowa said, "The results of this screening process should give consumers confidence in the reusable bags offered by both Iowa and Washington state retailers.

"Enforcement of the packaging law is part of Ecology's broader effort to address toxics in consumer products," Washington's Department of Ecology (Ecology) Director Ted Sturdevant said. "Ecology is increasing efforts to reduce the amount of toxic chemicals used in consumer products and to make consumers aware of safer alternatives."

Past testing has shown that single-use bags may also contain toxic metals. For example, Ecology notified a large national retailer in 2009 that some of their single-use shopping bags did not comply with Washington's packaging law. Ecology was able to work cooperatively with the company to bring it into compliance and remove the unacceptable packaging from retail locations in order to prevent their continued use.

Single-use bags purchased in other states have also been found to contain restricted metals above legal limits. Toxic substances in single-use or reusable bags can be replaced to make them safer.

Ecology supports the use of reusable bags as a means to reduce waste going into already overfilled landfills, as long as these bags are safe.

Iowa initially screened the 31 bags with an X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) instrument, which identified bags beyond or close to the 100 parts per million (ppm) limit for the toxic metals restricted by packaging laws in both states. Those four restricted metals are lead, mercury, cadmium and hexavalent chromium.

Any bags or parts of bags that failed the XRF screening were sent to Ecology's Manchester Laboratory for standard analysis to confirm the results.

The two companies in Washington state whose bag and bag insert were found to contain unacceptable levels of lead have been notified of Ecology's results. Both companies are fully cooperating with Ecology. The bag that failed has been removed from distribution and that company is working with Ecology to address any remaining issues. Ecology is conducting further testing to assure the problem has been resolved.

Ecology Director Ted Sturdevant said, "These collaborative, multiple-state efforts and targeted enforcements are good tools to encourage major manufacturers to eliminate their use of toxic metals in packaging."

Staff at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources contacted the supplier of the bag, which contained an insert above acceptable limits and is currently working with this supplier to address the problem.

Based on a national, Washington state adopted toxics in packaging legislation in 1991. The legislation limits the levels of lead, mercury, cadmium and hexavalent chromium to 100 ppm by weight for total concentration used in product packaging or packaging components. Manufacturers and suppliers are responsible for providing a "certificate of compliance" that their packaging meets requirements of the law if requested by Ecology.

Nineteen states have model toxics in packaging laws. Ten states are members of the Clearinghouse. Washington has been a member since 2008.

"Being a member of a national organization like the Clearinghouse has allowed us to leverage resources such as testing packaging samples and sharing information with other states," said K Seiler, program manager for Ecology's Hazardous Waste and Toxics Reduction Program.

Over recent years, the Clearinghouse has undertaken several packaging screening projects and extensive outreach to manufacturers and retailers about the toxic metal content of their packaging. The result has been in improved compliance with toxics in packaging requirements.

For example, a major U.S. retailer has changed the way it sells sheets. Rather than offer sheets in plastic bags that often fail for toxic metals, they are now sold in small cardboard boxes with hard plastic inserts that show the sheets inside. Ecology has tested this new packaging and found it complies with the toxics in packaging legislation. Enforcement actions by individual states have also helped to decrease toxics in the packaging of products offered for sale.

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(Editors: The single letter K is the full and correct spelling of Ms. Seiler's first name.)

For more information:

Reusable bag sampling results:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/hazcom/bagtests.html>

Ecology's Toxics in Packaging Website:

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/hazcom/toxpackage.html>

Iowa State Website: <http://www.iowadnr.gov/index.html>

Toxics in Packaging Clearinghouse Website: <http://www.toxicsinpackaging.org/>

Ecology's Website: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov>

Broadcast version

The states of Washington and Iowa tested reusable shopping bags and found few to contain hazardous toxic metals above limits allowed by law. Of the 31 bags tested, only one bag and inserts in two other bags contained toxics above allowable limits.

Washington state Ecology department partnered with Iowa state to purchase and test the reusable shopping bags for toxic metal content. Both states regulate toxics in packaging.

Both companies that issued the bags or inserts containing lead above legal limits are cooperating with the state agencies.

Past testing has shown that single-use bags may also contain toxic metals. Ecology supports use of reusable bags to reduce waste going into overfilled landfills.

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