Carpet recycling measure gains ground in California

Legislation to mandate higher carpet recycling rate awaits governor’s signature.

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The California legislature in mid-September 2017 has passed a bill that its backers say will require manufacturers to increase recycling and address environmental concerns posed by the production and disposal of carpet. A coalition of local governments, environmental, public health, carpet industry and union organizations support the legislation, and is now urging California Gov. Jerry Brown to sign it into law.

"AB (Assembly Bill) 1158 represents a major victory for California and the nation," says Heidi Sanborn, executive director of the National Action Stewardship Council, a supporter of the bill. "By mandating the carpet industry increase the amount of carpet [it recycles] and ensuring consumers aren’t unknowingly funding carpet disposal, we can increase green jobs, improve public health and protect the environment."

Carpets are comprised of 99 percent plastic, say the bill’s supporters. In 2016 in California more than 128,000 tons of carpets were disposed of in landfills and some 10,000 tons of carpeting was burned in incinerators, just in California, says the groups.

In 2010 California began requiring carpet manufacturers to implement a stewardship program to increase the recycling of carpet (AB 2398). Since passage, the carpet industry has failed to achieve meaningful progress, say backers of AB 1158.

"The program has collected over $45 million in consumer fees to date, yet has barely increased recycling," says Miriam Gordon with the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives. "AB 1158 will put an end to consumers paying an assessment in good faith that their discarded carpet will be recycled, when in fact it’s not."

AB 1158 would mandate the industry increase the carpet recycling to 24 percent by 2020. “AB 1158 enacts a series of common sense reforms to the state’s struggling carpet recycling program, and, most importantly, it finally demands that California manufacturers take back their products when they are discarded,” says Nick Lapis with Californians Against Waste.

Carpet companies including Interface and Tarkett say they have proven that the market has an increasing demand for safer, environmentally friendly, sustainable products. "As one of the carpet industries’ recycling pioneers, Tandus Centiva is in support of this bill," says Len Ferro, president of Tandus Centiva, a Tarkett company (http://www.tarkett.com). "The proposed legislation aligns with our parent company Tarkett’s sustainability principles, which include taking back product for recycling through our ReStart program."

Says Matt Miller, president of Interface Americas (https://www.interface.com/US/en-US/homepage), "Interface supports this bill because it is an important step forward toward a stronger carpet stewardship program in California. Recycling carpet at end of life is especially difficult in this era of low petroleum prices, making it economically challenging. As a result, a robust stewardship plan is that much more important today."
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