Supermarket Irony: Some Reusable Bags Tainted By Lead

Michael Gormley, Associated Press

ALBANY, New York (AP) — A U.S. senator is seeking a federal investigation after a newspaper's report of lead content in some reusable grocery bags.

Sen. Charles Schumer of New York told The Associated Press that many of the reusable grocery bags sold nationwide are manufactured in China. Schumer plans to announce Sunday that he is contacting the Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

There is less concern that the lead would easily rub off on food when the bags are new, but there is a concern that as bags wear down lead could accumulate in landfills, creating a potential environmental hazard.

Last week, the Tampa Tribune found some bags had lead levels that concerned health officials.

The Tribune found that lead appears to be in a form that's not easily extracted or "leached" out. But over time, lab experts note, the bags wear down and paint can flake off.

"When our families go to the grocery store looking for safe and healthy foods to feed their kids, the last thing they should have to worry about are toxic bags," Schumer said in a statement.

Schumer commended Wegmans supermarket company that operates in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia and Maryland for announcing in September that the groceries would stop selling certain reusable shopping bags because of the concern.

"A quick and thorough investigation will allow everyone to make informed, timely decisions," Schumer said.

Lead is considered a toxin and can cause learning disabilities in children and fertility problems in adults.

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