

## **DON'T BE LEFT HOLDING THE BAG:**

### **THE TRUE COST OF SINGLE-USE BAGS**

Called “an icon of convenience culture,”<sup>i</sup> the Guinness Book of World Records named the plastic bag--produced on a worldwide scale in the trillions--the most ubiquitous consumer product the world.<sup>ii</sup>

Plastic bag litter and waste create substantial socio-economic and environmental costs. California cities and counties have led the charge in banning plastic bags.

- **100:** The number of California jurisdictions that have adopted or are considering ordinances banning plastic single-use bags, including the County and City of Los Angeles, Pasadena, Long Beach, San Jose, and San Francisco. These cities and counties represent approximately 1/3 of the state population.<sup>iii</sup>



### How many bags are we talking about?

- **12 BILLION:** Estimated number of single-use plastic bags Californians consume per year.<sup>iv</sup>
- **5 PERCENT:** Despite active efforts to expand recycling programs, the recycling rate of single-use plastic bags remains around 5 percent.<sup>v</sup> With the sheer number of plastic bags used in California, recycling is not the solution.

**Out of sight does not mean plastic bags disappear.** *Plastic bags hang around long after we're done using them, often becoming litter and harming marine life.*

- **7,825,319:** The number of plastic bags collected during International Coastal Cleanup events over the last 25 years.<sup>vi</sup>
- **49:** The number of marine mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates entangled or trapped by plastic bags discovered by volunteers participating in the 2009 International Coastal Cleanup.<sup>vii</sup>

**Plastic bags trash more than just the environment.** *They blight urban and coastal communities, and the cost to clean up plastic bags wastes taxpayer dollars.*

- **25 PERCENT:** Due to their lightweight nature and the fact that they last indefinitely, single-use plastic carryout bags often end up as litter. For example, plastic carryout bags comprise 0.4 percent of the waste destined for California landfills, and one characterization study of urban litter in storm drains and the L.A. River estimated that plastic bag litter makes up as much as 25 percent of the litter stream.<sup>viii</sup>
- **\$25 MILLION:** Estimated amount California spends per year to landfill discarded plastic bags.<sup>ix</sup> This money that could otherwise go toward vital public services.
- **\$24 MILLION:** The amount L.A. County spends on litter prevention, cleanup efforts, and enforcement efforts.<sup>x</sup> Plastic bags are disproportionately responsible for these costs because they comprise a significant percentage of the litter stream.

**Just as there is no such thing as a free lunch, there is no such thing as a “free” bag.** *Reusable bags offer an affordable, sustainable alternative to disposable carryout bags.*

- **\$3.25:** The amount the average L.A. County resident saves annually by not using disposable plastic grocery bags.<sup>xi</sup> They may appear free, but the cost of disposable bags is hidden in the price of groceries and goods.
- **\$0.004:** The per use cost of a reusable bag (based on a 125 uses).<sup>xii</sup>

**The paper chase.** *Paper bags come with their own costs to the environment.*

- **FIFTY PERCENT:** The percentage of single-use paper bags recycled in the U.S.<sup>xiii</sup> Although some paper bags are made from postconsumer recycled materials, these bags are still designed for single-use and will likely end up in landfills or as litter 50% of the time. In addition, paper bag production can pollute our water with chemicals used in the pulp and paper making process.
- **\$0:** Consumers can avoid paper bag charges by using their own bags or refusing a bag at checkout.

**Help build a green job market in California.** *Already a national green job leader, bag bans may help provide a boost to this employment sector in the Golden State.*

- **15+:** The number of reusable bag companies in California.
- An informal survey by Heal the Bay in 2010 found that the California companies that make single use bags are largely non-Union, produce many other product lines (including plastic reusable bags), and also sell 95% of their bags outside California (so a plastic bag ban in California will not likely affect the manufacturing jobs in this industry to the extent claimed by several manufacturers).

**Bag bans work.** *Single-use bag ordinances are effective in reducing plastic pollution.*

- **NINETY-FOUR PERCENT:** Los Angeles County recently announced that its single-use bag ordinance, which became fully effective in 2012, has resulted in a 94% reduction in overall single-use bag usage (includes 100% reduction in plastic bag usage and a 25% reduction in paper bag usage).<sup>xiv</sup>
- **EIGHTY-NINE PERCENT:** Since January 2012, San Jose has prohibited distribution of all single-use bags except for recycled content paper bags, which consumers must purchase for 10 cents. The City’s 2012 litter surveys indicate that plastic bag litter has been reduced “approximately 89 percent in the storm drain system. . . when compared to [pre-ordinance] data . . . .”<sup>xv</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Mieszkowski, Katharine, *Plastic Bags are Killing Us*, Salon.com (August 10, 2007). Available at: [http://www.salon.com/2007/08/10/plastic\\_bags/](http://www.salon.com/2007/08/10/plastic_bags/) (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/guinness-world-recordsr-selects-top-records-of-the-decade-78763507.html> (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>iii</sup> <http://plasticbaglaws.org/legislation/state-laws/california-2/> (last accessed December 13, 2012).

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm> (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>v</sup> California Integrated Waste Management Board, Staff Report, Agenda Item 14, June 12, 2007, Board Meeting.

<sup>vi</sup> Ocean Conservancy, *Tracking Trash: 25 Years of Action for the Ocean* (2011). Available at: [http://act.oceanconservancy.org/pdf/Marine\\_Debris\\_2011\\_Report\\_OC.pdf](http://act.oceanconservancy.org/pdf/Marine_Debris_2011_Report_OC.pdf) (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>viii</sup> *Los Angeles County Plastic Bag Study: Staff Report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors* (August 2007). Available at: <http://ladpw.org/epd/pdf/PlasticBagReport.pdf> (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>ix</sup> <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm> (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>x</sup> AECOM for Los Angeles County, *Economic Impact Analysis: Proposed Ban on Plastic Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County* (2010). Available at: [http://ladpw.org/epd/aboutthebag/PDF/SocioEconomicImpactStudy\\_final.pdf](http://ladpw.org/epd/aboutthebag/PDF/SocioEconomicImpactStudy_final.pdf) (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>xi</sup> *Ibid.* at Table 9.

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xiii</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Municipal Waste Study 2009*. Available at: <http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw2009rpt.pdf> (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>xiv</sup> “About the Bag.” County of Los Angeles. Available at: <http://dpw.lacounty.gov/epd/aboutthebag/index.cfm> (last accessed on December 13, 2012).

<sup>xv</sup> Kerrie Romanow, City of San Jose, mem. to Transportation & Environment Com. re: Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance Implementation Results and Actions to Reduce EPS Foam Food Ware, Nov. 20, 2012. Available at: [http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203\\_d5.pdf](http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf) (last accessed on December 13, 2012).