



Frequently Asked Questions on City of LA Bag Proposal

What is the policy being considered?

The City's proposal would require a phased, three-step approach for curbing single-use bag use: for the first six months a ban would be enacted for plastic bags only, then for the following six months a 10 cent charge would be placed on paper bags and finally, after 12 months, there would be an outright ban on both single-use plastic and paper bags.

Why ban plastic bags?

Plastic Bags Harm Our Environment

Plastic bags blight our communities and harm the environment. Plastic bags, designed only to be used for minutes, never degrade and last hundreds of years in the ocean. Plastic pollution can kill wildlife that mistake it for food or become entangled in it. For example, floating plastic bags in the ocean often resemble jellyfish, a common food source for sea turtles and have been found in their digestive tracts.¹ Plastic bags also cause blight in our communities. Over the past twenty-five years, plastic bags have been one of the top ten items collected on International Coastal Cleanup Day.²

Plastic Bags Cost Our Economy

The City of San Francisco estimates that to clean up, recycle and landfill plastic bags costs as much as 17 cents per bag.³ That figure does not include external costs, e.g., resource extraction and depletion, quality of life issues, economic loss due to plastic bag litter and human health expenses. Based on this estimate the city of San Francisco calculates that it costs \$8.5 million for the city to clean up, dispose and recycle plastic bag litter.⁴

Cities Are Already Doing It

Forty-three California municipalities have adopted ordinances banning plastic single-use bags and dozens more are considering banning plastic bags in the near future. China, Mexico City and at least 40 countries and municipalities around the world have banned plastic bags (representing at least 25% of the world's population⁵).

State and World Leaders Are Calling for It

In 2008, the Ocean Protection Council called upon the California Legislature to ban or place consumer fees commonly littered items, including plastic single-use bags.⁶ The United Nations Environmental Programme Secretariat has called for a world-wide ban of plastic bags.⁷

¹ Mrosovsky, N et.al (2009) "Leatherback Turtles: The menace of plastic. Marine Pollution Bulletin," Marine Pollution Bulletin, 2009; 58 (2): 287.

² Coastal Conservancy. Tracking Trash: 25 Years of Action for the Ocean. 2011. Available at: http://act.oceanconservancy.org/pdf/Marine_Debris_2011_Report_OC.pdf

³ Office of Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, Fact Sheet: Costs Associated with Paper and Plastic Bags 1 (City and County of San Francisco 2007) (on file with author) (information from Mike Crossetti, San Francisco Recycling & Disposal). City of San Francisco Dept of the Environment "Bag Cost Analysis" (Nov.18, 2004).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Population estimates obtained from census offices, United Nations, and World Development Indicators 2008 population estimates. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country>, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/POP.pdf>

⁶ California Ocean Protection Council, "An Implementation Strategy for the California Ocean Protection Council Resolution to Reduce and Prevent Ocean Litter," Adopted November 20, 2008.

⁷ UNEP (2009) "UNEP Head Calls for World-Wide Ban on Pointless Thin Film Plastic Bags." UNEP, Press Release, June 8, 2009.



Does the Policy ban all plastic bags?

No. All bags not used at point of sale, such as bags used to transport produce, bulk items, raw meat, or other items to the checkout would still be available.

Why regulate paper bags?

Plastic and Paper both Need to be Addressed

The policy addresses both paper and plastic to drive greater use of reusable bags and prevent consumers from switching from one environmentally harmful product to another.

Paper Bags Are NOT Sustainable

The production of paper bags depletes our forests and natural resources, emits greenhouse gasses, and pollutes our water with toxic chemicals used in the pulp and paper making process.^{8,9}

For instance, the Greenhouse Gas Equivalent for one year for a kraft paper bag with handles is 11.8 carbon equivalent units. The same measure for a Single HDPE bag is 6.08. A reusable bag is only 1.96.¹⁰

Paper Is Recyclable But It Is Still a Waste

Most people are aware that paper bags are recyclable but only about 21% of them are actually recycled in California.¹¹ Although some paper bags are made from postconsumer recycled materials that contain no virgin tree fiber, these bags are more expensive for stores to purchase relative to other paper bags, and are still designed for single-use.

Will low income individuals be forced to pay for reusable bags?

There's a Hidden Cost to Disposable Bags

Grocery stores currently embed 2-5 cent per plastic bag price and embed 5-23 cents per paper bag in the cost of food.¹² If a ban is enacted it would save approximately \$18 to \$30 per person¹³ which could be put to better use.

These Communities Will Actually Benefit from a Ban on Single Use Bags

Lower income communities, some of the most blighted by plastic bag litter, are already paying millions of dollars in taxes for cleanup costs; money that could otherwise go toward vital public services. Some of the poorest international communities have banned plastic bags. Citizens of China, Africa, Mexico City, and India all shop without single use bags.

⁸ Australian Department of the Environment and Heritage Plastic Shopping Bags: Analysis of Levies and Environmental Impacts Final Report, prepared by Nolan-ITU, December 2002, Page 33; U.S. EPA Toxic Release Inventory 2006 data for Paper Industry-NAICS code 322. (Retrieved 12/31/08).

⁹ The United States is the largest paper product consumer per capita. Despite advances in recycling of paper, over 40% of the industrial wood harvest goes into making paper products. Between 2005 and 2021 the global demand for paper is expected to increase by over 60%. In the United States, the paper industry is the largest industrial user of water, the third largest industrial consumer of energy, ranks fourth among industrial sectors in the release of toxic chemicals in water, and ranks third in toxic air emissions. Source: Environmental Paper Network (2007). "The State of the Paper Industry: Monitoring Indicators of Environmental Performance." Available at: <http://www.environmentalpaper.org/stateofthepaperindustry> (Retrieved 3/10/2010).

¹⁰ LA County Report, primary source: Australian Department of Environment and Heritage Plastic Shopping Bags- Analysis of Levies and Environmental Impacts Final Report, prepared by Nolan-ITU, December 2002.

¹¹ California recycling rate U.S. Environmental Protection Agency *Municipal Waste Study 2005*.

¹² An Overview of Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County, August 2007. Retrieved at <http://ladpw.org/epd/pdf/PlasticBagReport.pdf>.

¹³ Ibid.



CA Manufacturing Will Actually Benefit from a Ban on Single Use Bags

Repeated inquiry in LA City Board of Public Works Commission hearings has failed to identify empirical and clear evidence that manufacturing jobs will be hurt by bans on single-use bags. CA is home to many reusable bag companies (over 20 companies), and only a handful of plastic bag makers (three are in Los Angeles County, none in LA City). An informal survey by Heal the Bay in 2010 found that the CA companies that make single use bags are largely non-Union, have many other product lines (including plastic reusable bags), and also sell 95% of their bags outside California. (thus the jobs for making these bags largely remain despite any bans).

Why not just increase recycling of plastic and paper bags?

We Cannot Recycle Our Way Out of This Problem

Efforts to increase recycling of plastic bags by creating take-back programs at grocery stores under AB 2449 (Levine, 2007) have shown minimal success.^{14,15} Despite these efforts, plastic bags are still making their way into the waste stream and storm drain systems, and often end up in the ocean.

Plastic Bags Are Very Costly and Difficult to Recycle

Plastic bags easily damage recycling equipment and jam screens used to separate materials. The City of San Jose reports that it costs them \$1 million per year to repair their recycling equipment from jammed plastic bags.¹⁶

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What's so bad about "biodegradable" or "compostable" plastic bags?

These Bags Don't Degrade Well in the Ocean

Plastics that are compostable or claim to be "biodegradable" have not proven to degrade in the marine environment and may pose serious threats to marine life. Instead, these bags require heat and certain types of bacteria, such as those present in industrial composting facilities, to completely break down into constituents that assimilate back into the environment.

What can I use for dog poop?

You can use newspaper, or newspaper cover bags, fruit and vegetable bags from the market or purchase dog waste bags.

What can I use for bin liners?

Remember, that there is already a "hidden cost" of using free disposable grocery bags of almost \$30 per year embedded in the cost of goods, far outweighing the cost of purchasing a box of bin liners that will last you the whole year. Trash bags are also not commonly found as litter on beaches or in waterways.

¹⁴ Personal communication with California Integrated Waste Management Board staff (8 Dec 2008); R. Davis Paper or Plastic?" *Voice of San Diego*, 2 Dec 2008.

¹⁵ "Plastic Carryout Bag Program Status Update." Presentation by the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery, Jenneen Hartshorn, March 8, 2010. Report noted that many grocery store chains did not respond to the audit requests and results were dependent on completion of a co-mingled recycling rate study by Cal State Sacramento due out in May 2010.

¹⁶ City of San Jose Environmental Services Division (Available at: <http://www.sjrecycles.org/bags>)

¹⁷ California recycling rate U.S. Environmental Protection Agency *Municipal Waste Study 2005*.