



## Frequently Asked Questions:

### City of Los Angeles' Proposed Single-Use Bag Ordinance

#### **What policy is being considered?**

The City of Los Angeles is proposing to adopt and implement an ordinance to ban the use of single-use plastic carryout bags. The ordinance would also charge a fee on paper bags and promote the use of reusable bags at certain retailers within the City. The proposed ban would apply to supermarkets, grocery stores, drug stores, convenience stores and businesses with a limited line of groceries (like pharmacies). A six-month grace period would be provided for large retailers and a one-year grace period would be provided for small retailers, which would include a public education component.

#### **Why ban plastic bags?**

##### ***Plastic bag litter harms our environment***

Plastic bag litter blights our communities and harms 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

##### ***Plastic bags cost our economy***

According to the CalRecycle website, California spends an estimated \$25 million a year to collect and landfill discarded plastic bags.<sup>3</sup> This is money that could otherwise be spent on vital public services.

##### ***California cities and counties are already doing it***

Fifty-three California jurisdictions have adopted ordinances banning plastic single-use bags and many 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 population<sup>4</sup>).

##### ***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.<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Environmental Programme Secretariat has called for a world-wide ban of plastic bags.<sup>6</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://act.oceanconservancy.org/pdf/Marine_Debris_2011_Report_OC.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> 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>

<sup>5</sup> California Ocean Protection Council, "An Implementation Strategy for the California Ocean Protection Council Resolution to Reduce and Prevent Ocean Litter," Adopted November 20, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> UNEP (2009) "UNEP Head Calls for World-Wide Ban on Pointless Thin Film Plastic Bags." UNEP, Press Release, June 8, 2009.



### **Does the proposed 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 bags in order to encourage use of reusable bags (or no bags!) and prevent consumers from switching from one environmentally-harmful product to another.

#### ***Paper bags are NOT sustainable***

Although paper bags pose less risk to the aquatic environment because of their biodegradability and are less likely to become litter because of their weight and recyclability, the manufacturing of virgin paper emits greenhouse gases and uses toxic substances in pulping process, which include caustic sodas, sodium hydroxide, sodium sulfide, and chlorine compounds.<sup>7</sup>

#### ***Paper is recyclable but it is still a waste***

Most people are aware that paper bags are recyclable but paper bags are only recycled 50% of the time.<sup>8</sup> 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.

### **Why should I pay for reusable bags?**

#### ***There's a hidden cost to disposable bags***

They may appear free, but the cost of disposable bags is hidden in the price of groceries and goods. Grocery stores currently embed 2-5 cent per plastic bag price and embed 5-23 cents per paper bag in the cost of food.<sup>9</sup> If a ban is enacted it would save approximately \$18 to \$30 per person per year.<sup>10</sup>

### **Why not just increase recycling of plastic bags?**

#### ***We cannot recycle our way out of this problem***

Despite active efforts to expand recycling programs, the statewide recycling rate of single-use plastic bags remains around 5 percent.<sup>11</sup> The majority of single-use plastic bags – even if reused once or twice by consumers – end up in our landfills or as part of the litter stream, polluting our inland and coastal communities.

#### ***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.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Green Cities California, *Master Environmental Impact Assessment on Single-Use and Reusable Bags*. Mar. 2010: 18. Print.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Municipal Waste Study 2009*. Available at: <http://www.epa.gov/osw/nonhaz/municipal/pubs/msw2009rpt.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> An Overview of Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County, August 2007. Retrieved at <http://ladpw.org/epd/pdf/PlasticBagReport.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Report notes that the annual cost of retailers of providing plastic bags and paper bags is \$18 and \$30 respectively per customer; costs were passed along to consumers. Another estimate of the hidden cost of plastic bags in Los Angeles County by AECOM Technical Services in 2010 is \$3.25 per person annually, assuming each person uses 433 bags each year at an average cost of \$0.008 per plastic bag. 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).

<sup>11</sup> California Integrated Waste Management Board, Staff Report, Agenda Item 14, June 12, 2007, Board Meeting.

<sup>12</sup> City of San Jose Environmental Services Division (Available at: <http://www.sjrecycles.org/bags>)



### **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 to pick up dog poop or for bin liners?**

You can use newspaper, or newspaper cover bags, fruit and vegetable bags from the market or purchase dog waste bags. Fruit and vegetable bags can be used as bin liners, or you can forgo bin liners entirely.

### **How can I remember to bring bags to the store?**

- Always start your grocery list with "Bring Bags."
- Keep a collapsible bag in your purse or briefcase for those emergency runs to the stores.
- Hang a bag on the door knob to your garage or someplace nearby. It will serve as a constant visual reminder to bring your bags with you.

### **What if I forget my reusable bag?**

- If you have a small number of items you can carry them out by hand or put them in your purse.
- You can place your items back in your grocery cart and unload them into your trunk.
- You can purchase a reusable bag and take it to the store on future trips.