

# The Plight of the Disposable Bag



# Situation Analysis - Issue

*Ever since its production in the 50's plastic has provided a cheap and convenient alternative to organic containers.*

*The ease and convenience that plastic bags provide has become a staple for consumers who remain unaware of the impacts plastic has on public health and the Environment.*

*Half a century later, we're really feeling the impacts of decades of plastic bag consumption and disposal with careless abandonment. Our wildlife, natural environment, and our economy are all taking a hit from plastic bag pollution.*

*The environment is suffocating under 50 years worth of plastic products – items that take thousands of years to break down and the math just doesn't add up.*



# Issue's Impacts

## ▪ **Loss of Resources**

- It requires 2.2 billion pounds of fossil fuel and 3.9 billion gallons of fresh water to produce the 100 billion plastic bags the US consumes each year.
- The manufacturing of these bags produces a billion pounds of solid waste and 2.7 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.
- Paper bags are no better - Manufacturing and shipping paper bags requires even more energy and water, and creates more pollution, than plastic bags. In addition, producing the paper bags used in the U.S. each year requires 14 million trees.

## ▪ **Threats to Wildlife**

- Plastic pollution negatively impacts 267 species of marine life.

## ▪ **Damages to the Natural Environment**

- Globally, there is now more plastic in our oceans than plankton, with 46,000 pieces of plastic in every square mile of ocean.

# Issue's Impacts

## ▪ **Impacts on the Economy**

- U.S. retailers spend \$4 billion per year on disposable bags, and that cost is passed on to the consumer in the form of higher prices.
- Free plastic bags are NOT free. Municipalities have to pay to clean up bags – NYC spends \$12.5 million per year to dispose of plastic bags. Many municipalities have employees clean up plastic bags blowing around the landfill.
- On their way to becoming ocean pollution, plastic bags clog storm drains and damage infrastructure. In 1998, plastic bag pollution in Bangladesh clogged storm drains and was the primary cause of severe floods that submerged 2/3 of the country.

# Dangers to Wildlife

Plastic bag pollution negatively impacts 267 species of marine and wildlife. Fish and wildlife mortalities are caused by strangulation, restricted mobility, and disrupted ingestion.

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*Once eaten, the bags cannot be processed and block the digestive system.*

*The blockages can lead to a slow and painful death from starvation or dehydration.*

*When the animal dies and decomposes, the plastic bags will be re-released into the environment.*



# Impacts on the Natural Environment

- Millions of tons of garbage have formed plastic masses in our oceans. Plastic is believed to constitute 90 per cent of all of this garbage.
- The largest mass is the North Pacific “Garbage Patch”, which has over 100 million tons of floating garbage.
- The Pacific gyre, which was first discovered in 1997, is now over 500 miles wide.
- It takes only weeks for the ocean currents to pull plastic from a bay or beach and into the plastic mass gyre, where it will remain forever.

**We cannot clean up these gyres:** Since plastic bags never fully break down, these plastic patches are comprised of submerged, partially broken-down microplastics – in other words, a plastic soup.



# CCE & Plastic Bags

The impacts of plastic bag pollution have ignited a global movement to dramatically reduce the amount of disposable plastic shopping bags. Promoting reusable bags and plastic bag recycling are just one of the many ways to protect our waterways and wildlife.

*CCE works with the public, local, and state governments to reduce the plastic bag pollution.*

## Facing the facts

According to the EPA, between 500 billion and a trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide each year.

The average American family uses about 1,500 plastic bags per year

Americans alone throw away over 100 billion bags

Every hour, approximately 200,000 plastic bags are land filled



# Alternative Policy Options

## Implementing a bag ban

Prohibit any retailers from distributing plastic bags for consumer use. Many of the bans on plastic bags are coupled with a surcharge on paper bags.

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## Implementing a surcharge on bags

Require that retailers to place a minimal charge on bags to deter customers from using them.

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# Impacts of Implementing Plastic Bag Legislation

- We will be using less energy and emissions in manufacturing and transporting the bags.
- Less resources (water, trees and fossil fuels) would be required for production of bags.
- Open spaces like parks and beaches will become less polluted and more appealing as tourist attractions.
- Wildlife deaths due to plastic bags will drop dramatically.
- Retailers will save money on disposable bags and taxpayers will save money from waste reduction.



# Case Study: Ireland

The 2008 International Coastal Cleanup \* found plastic bags to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest debris item that was picked up and accounted for 12% of everything collected.

In the US: 229,758

In NY: 22,424

In CT: 5,187

**Ireland: 67**

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Ireland's 2002 22 Euro cent plastic bag surcharge has completely changed consumer behavior.

In just six years, plastic bag consumption has been cut dramatically.

The country has seen a 90% decrease in the use of plastic bags since the surcharge.

Throughout the country, there is an estimated One Billion fewer plastic bags consumed annually.

# Case Study: California

- A San Jose Study -Litter was reduced by "approximately 89 percent in the storm drain system, 60 percent in the creeks and rivers, and 59 percent in city streets and neighborhoods," according to a report from San Jose's Transportation and Environment Committee (City of San Jose, November 2012).
- Los Angeles found a 94% overall decrease in single-use bag use after their legislation. with a nearly 100% decrease in plastic bag use and a 25% decrease in paper bag use. Similar results in San Francisco and San Jose found that consumers did not switch to paper, but switched to reusable bags (Los Angeles DPW).
- A recent study of the financial effects of two California bans found that there was “no sustained negative (economic) impact to retailers”, and predictions from San Francisco's Office of Economic Analysis determined a “slight positive impact on the local economy.” That same study predicts a \$3 million dollar savings for retailers under San Francisco’s strengthened ban, as they would no longer be paying for single-use plastic bags given out for free to customers (SanDiego.gov)

# Local Case Studies

## Bans

In 2008, the town of Westport , CT approved a resolution, to ban plastic bags at retail checkout counters.

Following the success of that legislation, the Villages of East Hampton, Southampton, Patchogue,. Mamaroneck, Larchmont, Hastings on Hudson, New Paltz, Patchogue, New Castle, and City of Rye in New York all adopted similar bans.

The Towns of East Hampton and South Hampton have also passed bans.

## Fees

Washington DC -A five cent surcharge on all single-use bags went into effect in 2010. DC experienced an 80% reduction in disposable bag use the first year.

Following the footsteps of DC, New York City passed legislation placing a 5 cent fee on plastic and paper bags in 2016.

The City of Long Beach and Suffolk County passed 5 cent fees, modeled on NYC, in 2016 as well.

This year, NYS passed legislation preempting NYC's law and is working on a state-wide solution instead. LB and Suffolk's laws will go into effect.

# Additional Places with Plastic Bag Legislation

## Fees:

- Switzerland; Germany; Belgium; Denmark; India; Taiwan, Wales; Toronto, Canada; South Africa
- In the US –Chicago, Seattle, Washington; Brisbee, Arizona; Fort Collins, Basalt, and Boulder, Colorado; Portland, Maine; Montgomery County, Maryland; Dallas, Texas

## Bans :

- Australia; Amsterdam; Bangladesh; Cameroon; Pucon, Chile; France; Haiti; Italy; Ivory Coast; Mali; Mauritania; Pakistan; Makati, Philippines; Rwanda; Tanzania
- California and Hawaii; Santa Fe; Austin; Portland, Oregon
- Municipalities in Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, New Mexico, and Washington

# Plastic Bag Recycling Policies

**Plastic bag recycling policies have been implemented as an alternative to bans or fees, but they are simply NOT effective.**

- 5-10% of plastic bags are recycled in the US. In New York, which has had a plastic bag recycling law since 2009, recycling rates have not significantly improved.
- Plastic bags are less than 1% of the waste of the waste stream, but they create a large problem.
  - Plastic bags are difficult to recycle and have a very limited market for reuse, unlike some other plastics, paper or metal items.
  - Plastic bags must be sorted separately at recycling plants because they clog machines when they are mixed in with other recyclables. It costs Waste Management time and money whenever a missed bag gets caught in a machine.

# CCE's Policy Recommendation

**Ban Plastic and Charge for Paper, or place a fee on both.**

•**Goal** – encourage consumers to BYOBag

The majority of legislation in the US (including all of California) has banned plastic and implement a charge on paper, or has placed a small (5 or 10 cent) fee on plastic and paper bags.



•**Why not just a ban on plastic?** The goal is not get people to switch from plastic to paper; it's to get people to switch from disposable to renewable. From DC to Ireland, we have seen that minimal charges on bags will change consumer behavior.

- This type of Legislation in Los Angeles has led to a 95% reduction in single use bags, including a 30% reduction in paper bags (which are up to 5X more expensive than plastic bags).

- In Chicago, after a ban on thin plastic bags went into effect, stores switched to thicker plastic or paper. There was not a significant switch to BYOBag behavior and waste actually increased. Chicago now has a 7 cent tax on plastic and paper.



# What You Can Do

- **Start bringing your own reusable bag. Reusable bags are sturdier and hold up to 4 times as much as a disposable bag. Plus, a single reusable bag can prevent 1,000 single use bags from entering our environment.**
- **Support a local law to reduce single-use bags. Write a letter and come speak out a public hearing in support of a local law to ban or place a fee on plastic bags.**
- **Encourage local businesses to promote BYOBag behavior. Let them know that customers are committed to switching to reusable bags.**