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**SAVE THE BAY LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO ELIMINATE PLASTIC BAG  
POLLUTION IN CALIFORNIA**

***San Francisco Bay's Leading Champion Asks California to Stand up to Plastics Industry***

**San Francisco Bay Area – April 14, 2009** – Save The Bay, San Francisco Bay's leading champion, today launched "The Bay vs. the Bag" campaign to significantly reduce pervasive plastic bag pollution in Bay Area waterways that spoils water quality and threatens wildlife. Save The Bay is helping San Jose and other Bay Area cities create and pass bold legislation to require a 25 cent fee on both paper and plastic bags distributed by all retailers. Through its website and a compelling online video, Save The Bay is mobilizing tens of thousands of Bay Area residents to stand up to the plastics industry by supporting these city efforts to immediately "kick the bag habit" by switching to reusable bags. (The campaign site and video will be available online on April 14 at <http://www.saveSFbay.org/bayvsbag>)

"The plastics industry is putting profits over the health of San Francisco Bay," said David Lewis, Executive Director of Save The Bay. "Plastic bag pollution is unnecessary, preventable and costly. Bags clog storm drains and recycling equipment, costing cities millions of dollars, and bag litter lowers property values and degrades recreational areas."

Bay Area residents use 3.8 billion plastic bags per year and discard over one hundred plastic bags per second, according to the California Integrated Waste Management Board. It is estimated that about one million of these bags wind up in the Bay each year where they pollute the water, smother wetlands and entangle and kill animals.

**Plastic and Paper Bag Bans and Fees are Proven Solutions**

Fees on single-use bags are proven to reduce litter and plastic bag use and motivate shoppers to switch to reusable bags. In Ireland, a 33 cent fee on plastic bags reduced their use by 90 percent and reduced plastic bag litter by 93 percent in one year, as reported by Ireland's Department of the Environment. IKEA in Britain reports that charging customers for bags resulted in a 95 percent decrease in plastic bag use.

"The bottom line is that plastic bag pollution is threatening the health of San Francisco Bay, the ocean and our whole environment. The best policy is to eliminate these toxic products through bans and fees – and by switching to reusable bags – before the destruction becomes completely irreversible," said Lewis.

**San Jose and California Consider Landmark Ordinances**

The City of San Jose, the third largest city in California, is committed to significantly reducing single-use bags in the environment by driving residents to reusable bags. Through stakeholder and community outreach, findings conclude that residents and local recyclers are in favor of a fee ordinance. If the San Jose City Council passes this ordinance, it will be the first California city to reduce bag usage by requiring a fee on both plastic and paper bags. A similar effort is underway at the California state level. California state bill (AB 68) currently being considered in the legislature would require a 25 cent fee on plastic and paper bags. Under this bill, fee revenue will be distributed for litter clean up and prevention, retailers will retain a portion to offset costs and incentivize reusable bags, and low-income customers will be exempt.

"The City of San Jose is committed to significantly reducing single-use bags in the environment," said Councilmember Kansen Chu. "Plastic bags litter our creeks. In fact, the State Water Board has listed several waterways in the Bay Area, including Guadalupe River and Coyote Creek as 'impaired by trash.' Plastic debris, including bags, makes up 60 percent of the litter polluting our waterways. Experience has shown that outreach and recycling options alone are not enough to reduce the consumption of single-use carryout bags."

**Like Big Tobacco, The Plastics Industry is Bullying Cities with Lawsuits**

Toxic plastic bag pollution is a growing problem in California and throughout the world. The North Pacific Ocean hosts a floating garbage patch the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch", twice the size of Texas, where a



study recently found that plastic particles are more abundant than plankton (Algalita Marine Research Foundation). But the multi-billion dollar plastics industry has dispatched industry lobbyists to California and other states to block efforts to reduce bag use and sue cities for banning or requiring fees on single-use bags.

Like the tobacco industry, which launched campaigns to stop smoking bans, the plastic bag industry has sued or is threatening to sue Oakland, Palo Alto, Santa Cruz, Fairfax, Manhattan Beach, Seattle, and other cities. The lawsuits aim to force cash-strapped cities to prepare expensive environmental studies analyzing the impacts of bag bans and fees, or abandon their efforts. Now California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Ocean Protection Council has recommended eliminating plastic bags because they cause serious litter and marine debris problems. This month the Council will consider helping cities comply with legal requirements by funding a Master Environmental Assessment (MEA). This MEA will provide the necessary background information for California cities to quickly complete studies required for new ordinances to restrict single-use bags.

### **About Save The Bay**

Save The Bay is the largest regional organization working to protect, restore and celebrate San Francisco Bay. As its leading champion since 1961, Save The Bay protects the Bay from pollution and inappropriate shoreline development, making it cleaner and healthier for people and wildlife. We restore habitat and secure strong policies to re-establish 100,000 acres of wetlands that are essential for a healthy Bay. We engage more than 25,000 supporters, advocates and volunteers to protect the Bay, and inspire the next generation of environmental leaders by educating thousands of students annually.

[www.saveSFbay.org](http://www.saveSFbay.org)

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## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR PRESS**

### **Recycling Flimsy Bags Doesn't Work**

California has pushed a statewide effort to recycle plastic bags for fifteen years. Despite this, the California Integrated Waste Management Board estimates that **less than five percent of all single use plastic bags in the state are actually recycled**, and there is little market for "down-cycled" plastic film. Recycling firms report extensive costs from trying to recycle this small portion of plastic bags because they jam processing machines and cause work stoppages. In San Jose, less than four percent of plastic bags are recycled and work stoppages from jammed bags cost the City approximately \$1 million per year.

### **Plastic Bags are Bad for the Environment**

It is no secret that plastic bags are a major component of urban litter. Even when placed in trash bins, these lightweight bags are picked up by wind and blown into the gutters – where they flow into bays and the ocean. On just one day in 2007, over 25,000 bags were removed from San Francisco Bay – this amount represents only a small fraction of the total plastic trash flowing into the Bay and ocean. Bay Area residents use 3.8 billion plastic bags per year and discard over one hundred plastic bags per second. It is estimated that about one million of these bags wind up in the Bay each year where they pollute our waters, smother wetlands and entangle and kill animals.

Trash in the Bay has global ramifications. Plastic bags were the second largest item picked up during the Ocean Conservancy's 2008 International Coastal Cleanup Day, and Bay trash contributes to the 334,271 pieces of plastic per square mile measured in the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch." The critically endangered leatherback sea turtle, which migrates by the mouth of San Francisco Bay on a 5,000 mile journey from the South Pacific, can mistake plastic bags for the jellyfish that constitute its diet.

### **Plastic Bag Litter Costs Cities Millions**

California taxpayers spend approximately \$25 million every year to collect and landfill plastic bags. Local agencies spend millions more cleaning up plastic bag litter from streets, storm drains, and waterways. Volunteers spend countless hours plucking dirty bags from neighborhood creeks. Regional landfills pay staff to walk the trash mound and capture plastic bags that blow away.