



Fact Sheet Reducing Single-Use Plastic Bags in the Environment

Single-use plastic bags threaten San Francisco Bay and California coastal waters.

- Plastic marine debris entangles, suffocates, and poisons at least 313 species worldwide, including sea turtles, birds, and marine mammals.¹
- 1.37 million plastic bags were picked up by volunteers during the Ocean Conservancy's 2008 International Coastal Cleanup Day, second only in number to cigarette butts.²
- Californians use approximately 19 billion plastic bags and 5 billion paper bags annually.³ Average use time of a plastic bag is 12 minutes.⁴
- According to the California Coastal Commission, up to 80 percent of all marine debris, and 90 percent of floating debris is plastic, which never biodegrades.⁵
- 12 million barrels of oil are used to produce 30 billion plastic bags in the United States every year.⁶
- The Ocean Conservancy's annual report states that plastic bag make up 11% of all beach litter.⁷
- Paper bags aren't a good alternative: paper bag production in the U.S. consumes 14 billion trees per year.⁸

Consumers are already paying the high costs of plastic bags.

- Consumers are already paying for plastic bags through higher costs at retail stores, and higher recycling and garbage rates.

1 "Plastic Waste: Ecological and Human Health Impacts." Science for Environment Policy, Nov. 2011. Web. 11 June 2012.

<<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/IR1.pdf>>.

2 "7M Pounds of Debris Collected in World's Waterways", Brian Skoloff, Associated Press, March 10, 2009

3 Zero Waste California, "Recycle Plastic Grocery Bags: Paper or Plastic?", Zero Waste California, <http://zerowaste.ca.gov/PlasticBags/default.htm>, (November 15 2007)

4 "Fighting the Tide of Plastic Bags in a World Awash with Waste" <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/07/13/eco.plasticbagwaste/index.html>

5 M. Gordon 2006. Eliminating Land-based Discharges of Marine Debris in California: A Plan of Action from The Plastic Debris Project. Prepared for the California Coastal Commission.

6 Ned Potter, "Saving the World, One Plastic Bag at a Time", ABC News, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/Story?id=2935417&page=1>, (March 8, 2007)

7 "Trash Travels: 2010 Report." The Ocean Conservancy, n.d. Web. 21 June 2012.

<http://act.oceanconservancy.org/images/2010ICCRReportRelease_pressPhotos/2010_ICC_Report.pdf>.

8 Thompson, Anne. (12/31/1969). "Paper or Plastic, What's the Greener Choice?" MSNBC <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18538484/>.

SAVE THE BAY

- In California, approximately 24 billion bags end up in landfills annually and the cost to place these plastic bags there accounts to \$25 million dollars each year.⁹
- Work stoppages caused by plastic bags jamming equipment at recycling centers can cost the City of San Jose approximately \$1 million. In addition, the City of San Jose spends \$3 million per year on various litter abatement programs, not including volunteers hours, Valley Transportation Authority and CalTrans costs.¹⁰
- The plastic bag industry collects \$4 billion per year in profits from U.S. retailers, who pass the costs to consumers.¹¹

Recycling bags has been ineffective.

- Less than one percent of plastic carry-out bags are recycled each year. Recycling one ton of plastic bags costs \$4,000. The recycled product can be sold for \$32.¹²
- Recyclers report that it costs approximately 17 cents to recycle each plastic bag they receive and that it is very difficult to find a market for the recycled plastic film.¹³
- In most cases it costs more to deliver the plastic to a recycling facility than the plastic is worth.¹⁴
- Plastic bags are a hassle for recycling facilities – they are usually too contaminated to recycle, may contain sharp or otherwise hazardous materials, and they jam sorting equipment.¹⁵

Bag litter can be prevented by implementing a ban on the free distribution of single use bags.

- The Washington D.C. Bag Reduction Program resulted in a 50-60% decrease of single use bags. Furthermore, 50% fewer bags were found in the annual cleanup of Anacostia River.¹⁶
- In China, the use of plastic bags at supermarkets went down an average of 66 percent in one year, after the government enacted a ban on giving away free plastic bags June 1,

9 "Shopping? Take Reusable Bags!" CalRecycle. N.p., 23 Nov. 2011. Web. 13 June 2012.

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

10 City of San Jose staff report, San Jose Transportation and Environment Committee Hearing, February 2, 2009.

11 Fortune magazine, May 12, 2008.

12 "Waste and Recycling Facts." Clean Air Council. N.p., n.d. Web. 13 June 2012. <<http://www.cleanair.org/Waste/wasteFacts.html>>.

13 K. Bushnell, "Sustainable Consumption, Plastic Bags: What About Recycling Them?", Sierra Club,

14 Wilson, Stiv J. "In Defense of Plastic Bag Bans." TheHuffingtonPost.com, 29 Dec. 2011. Web. 11 June 2012. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/stiv-j-wilson/plastic-bag-ban_b_1175143.html>.

15 "Why Are Plastic Bags So Bad For Your Recycling Bin?" Planet Ark. Web. Accessed 29 June 2012.

<<http://recyclingweek.planetark.org/recycling-info/plasticbags.cfm>>

16 Riley, Charles. "No paper, no plastic. The tax that works too well." money.cnn.com. Web. 5 October 2010.

<http://money.cnn.com/2010/10/04/news/economy/DC_bag_tax/index.htm>

SAVE THE BAY

2008. A survey showed that in the first year, 40 billion fewer plastic bags were given out at supermarkets.¹⁷

- Within months of implementing an ordinance the number of consumers using reusable bags or taking no bag at all can reach 95% and above.¹⁸

In order to be effective at changing consumer habits, policies that restrict free distribution of plastic bags should:

- Provide consistency through broad coverage across all retail outlets, not just large groceries and pharmacies.
- Ensure a switch to reusable bags by eliminating the free distribution of both plastic and paper single-use bags.
- Bring local partners and stakeholders in to the policy process and discuss the advantages and cost savings to businesses and the community.
- Include a funding plan for publicity, enforcement and administrative activities.
- Explore options for distributing reusable bags to those that need them most.

¹⁷ www.chinaview.cn May 28, 2009 http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/28/content_11448396.htm

¹⁸ James, Tim. California Grocers Association. Personal Communication, 13 April 2012.