

THE FACTS ABOUT PLASTIC BAGS: RECYCLABLE, AFFORDABLE, AND CONVENIENT



Plastic bags are 100% recyclable, reusable, made from natural gas, not oil, and a sustainable choice for consumers, communities and businesses. What's more, the plastic bag manufacturing and recycling industry is a uniquely American industry that employs more than 30,000 Americans in 349 plants across the country, including more than 1,000 people in Washington state.

Bans and taxes on plastic bags are misguided policies that don't make sense. They don't help the environment, force less sustainable options, threaten local manufacturing jobs and raise grocery costs for consumers.

Instead of banning a reusable, 100% recyclable, American-made product, recycling solutions can help reduce litter, give consumers a choice, and protect American jobs.

Plastic grocery bags are the best checkout option for our environment

- On a per bag basis, plastic bags are more resource efficient, reduce landfill waste and generate fewer greenhouse gas emissions.
 - They take up a lot less space in a landfill: 1,000 plastic bags weigh 13 pounds; 1,000 paper bags weigh 114 pounds.ⁱ
 - They generate 80 % less waste than paper bags.ⁱⁱ
- American plastic bags are made from natural gas, NOT oil. In the U.S., 85 percent of the raw material used to make plastic bags is produced from natural gas.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Recycled plastic bags are used to make new plastic bags and building products, such as backyard decks, playground equipment, and fences.

Bans haven't worked in other places, and don't protect the environment

- A ban would make no difference in litter reduction since plastic bags only make up a tiny fraction (less than 0.5 %) of the U.S. municipal solid waste stream.^{iv}
- Plastic bag bans also force consumers to buy heavier gauge plastics for every day household uses (like garbage liners), since plastic grocery bags are re-used nine out of ten times by consumers.
- Despite South Australia's ban on plastic bags, which has been in place since 2009, a 2011 litter report found the percentage of plastic bags climbed from four percent in 2010 to 12 percent in 2011. The report also found that the ban drove consumers to use and discard reusable, heavier-gauge bags designed for reuse.^v

Banning plastic bags drives consumers to less sustainable options, including reusable bags

- Plastic bags are more resource efficient than paper. For every seven trucks needed to deliver paper bags, only one truck is needed for the same number of plastic bags.^{vi} The production of plastic bags consumes less than four percent of the water needed to make paper bags.^{vii}
- Hundreds of millions of reusable bags are imported from other countries^{viii} — more than we could ever use. Unlike plastic bags, most reusable bags are made from foreign oil and cannot be recycled.
- Many people aren't aware that if not cleaned, reusable bags harbor dangerous bacteria. In fact, a University of Arizona study showed that half of all reusable bags contained food-borne bacteria, like salmonella and E. coli.^{ix}
 - A 2010 Norovirus outbreak in Oregon that sickened nine girls on a youth soccer team was linked to a contaminated reusable grocery bag.^x

- Meanwhile, a recent study by the U.K. government found a standard reusable cotton grocery bag must be reused 131 times “to ensure that they have lower global warming potential than” a single use of a plastic bag.^{xi}

A ban on plastic grocery bags threatens American manufacturing jobs, including those of families

- The plastic bag recycling, distributing and manufacturing industry supports more than 1,000 jobs in facilities across Washington.^{xii}
- More than 30,000 American manufacturing jobs in 349 plants across the country are threatened by proposed ordinances to ban plastic bags.^{xiii}
- At a time of record unemployment, American plastic bag manufacturers continued to create jobs with benefits and to invest in green technologies that revolutionized the plastic recycling industry.

Any ban will raise grocery costs for Washington residents, inconveniencing local consumers

- The prices of wholesale goods jumped 5.7 % in the past year, and there was a sharp hike in the prices of necessities like vegetables, chicken and meats.^{xiv}
- Forcing shoppers to pay for reusable bags or pay a tax for paper ones will only make their grocery bills even higher.

Recycling is a better solution

- Recycling addresses all plastic bags, sacks and wraps, which can be recycled and manufactured into new products like decking or piping – supporting jobs that already exist and creating new ones.
- In 2010, nearly 900 million pounds of post-consumer plastic bags and wraps were recycled. Plastic bag, sack and wrap recycling jumped 24 % between 2009 and 2010.^{xv}
- Consumers can bring their 100 % recyclable plastic bags and wraps to participating stores and drop them into plastic bag recycling bins. From there, the bags and wraps are picked up for recycling.
 - The industry has established Abagslife.com, a public educational campaign that unites non-profit, business, community and government organizations around the common goal of promoting reducing, reusing and recycling. The site identifies bag drop-off locations by state.
 - Hilex Poly, a leading bag manufacturer and recycler, has implemented a Bag-2-Bag program, which has created more than 30,000 recycling drop off points nationwide and promotes plastic bag recycling by working with grocery stores and retailers to make recycling easier.

ⁱ [Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags – Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper](#); Chet Chaffee and Bernard R. Yaros, Boustead Consulting & Associates Ltd.; 2007; p. 9

ⁱⁱ [ibid](#); p. 54

ⁱⁱⁱ Analysis by Chemical Market Associates, Inc.; February, 2011.

^{iv} [Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: 2009 Facts and Figures](#); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; p. 53

^v Adelaide Now: Clean Up Australia report shows plastic bag ban not curbing dumping. 2/8/2012

^{vi} “RAN Encourages Plastic Bag Recycling;” Nevada News – April 2008; Retail Association of Nevada; <http://www.rannv.org/documents/8/April%202008.pdf>

^{vii} Boustead Consulting & Associates: “Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags—Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper,” 2007.

^{viii} Tariff and trade data from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. International Trade Commission.

^{ix} “[Assessment of the Potential for Cross Contamination of Food Products by Reusable Shopping Bags](#),” Charles Gerba; University of Arizona; June 9, 2010

^x <http://jid.oxfordjournals.org/content/205/11/1639.full>

^{xi} U.K. Environmental Agency. “Life Cycle Assessment of Supermarket Carrier Bags.” February 2011

^{xii} Manufacturing, distributing and recycling jobs throughout the state, based on January 2012 survey of businesses.

^{xiii} <http://www.plasticsindustry.org/APBA/>

^{xiv} [Wholesale prices rose modestly last month; inflation still looks same](#); The Washington Post; December 15, 2011.

^{xv} [Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: 2009 Facts and Figures](#); and [2010 Facts and Figures](#); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.