

Public Works Perspective: *Why should public agencies limit single use plastic bags?*



**Department of Public Works
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Background

- Plastic carryout bags were first introduced around 1975
- 80% of all grocery stores in the U.S. currently use plastic bags
- 19 billion plastic bags are consumed in California each year
 - 6 billion plastic bags in LA County
 - 45,000 tons of plastic bags are landfilled annually (0.4% of the disposal waste stream)
 - 117,000 tons of paper bags are landfilled in LA County annually (1% of the disposal waste stream, due to greater weight/bag)

Why Are Plastic Bags Problematic?

- Plastic Carryout Bags
 - ✓ 0.4% of the waste stream
 - ✓ Up to **25%** of the litter stream
- Materials are lightweight, easily windblown, and last indefinitely - resulting in a *disproportionate impact* on the environment and public infrastructure

Economic Impacts of Plastic Bag Litter

- According to the State of CA, public agencies in CA spend over \$375 million for litter prevention, cleanup, and disposal.
- The L.A. County Flood Control District spends more than \$24 million on litter prevention, cleanup, and enforcement efforts.
- Caltrans District 7, which covers LA and Ventura Counties, collected 50,000 CY of litter and debris at a cost of \$12 million/yr.



San Francisco Study

- San Francisco supermarket passed out 50 million bags a year - 90% plastic and 10% paper
 - Removal of bags from the recycling and compost streams, clearing machinery jams, and contamination of recycled and composted material results in **\$1.09 million** in added cost or lost sales - 2.2 cents per bag
 - Collection and disposal. Collecting and disposing of bags costs **\$3.6 million** annually - 7.2 cents per bag
 - Removing bags from city streets costs **\$2.6 million** a year - 5.2 cents per bag
 - Potential remediation and processing costs of bags in city landfills is **\$1.2 million** annually - 2.4 cents per bag
- TOTAL COST: 17 cents per bag

LA County Efforts

- April 2007 - Board of Supervisors instruction
 - Investigate the issue of polyethylene plastic and paper sack consumption in the County, including the pros and cons of adopting a policy similar to that of San Francisco
- August 2007 – “An Overview of Carryout Bags in Los Angeles County”
 - Manufacture, distribution, and use of plastic carryout bags in Los Angeles County
 - Fiscal, environmental, and public health impacts created by the consumption of plastic bags
 - Alternatives to plastic bag consumption

LA County Efforts

- Established Stakeholder Working Group:
 - Including representatives of supermarkets, retailers, environmental groups, the plastic bag industry, the public, and local government
 - Investigate measures to reduce the consumption of plastic and paper carryout bags at retail establishments throughout the County
- January 22, 2008 – Board of Supervisors adopted Alternative 5
Voluntary Single Use Bag Reduction and Recycling Program, educated businesses and shoppers alike about ways to reduce the impacts of litter from single use bags on the environment; encourage shoppers to utilize reusable bags; and enhance the recycling of single use plastic bags and paper bags.

LA County Efforts

- July 1, 2008 – Launch of Single Use Bag Reduction and Recycling Program
 - Included Board-established benchmarks for rate of plastic bag disposal reduction:
 - 30% by July 1, 2010
 - 65% by July 1, 2013
- Brag About Your Bag[®] Reusable Bag Giveaway and Plastic Bag Recycling Campaign
 - November 15, 2009 to December 17, 2009
 - ❖ Approximately 60,000 reusable bags distributed
 - ❖ Approximately 45,000 plastic bags collected for recycling
- July 17, 2008 - Legal Challenge

LA County Efforts

- ❖ Single Use Bag Reduction and Recycling Program was not successful in meeting goals:
 - Over a 2-year period and despite State law requirements under AB 2449, stores did not provide data that would enable staff to determine if the first voluntary Program benchmark of 30% was met
 - No more than 8 stores at any given time had met the *minimum* participation levels
- ❖ 2008 Board action included instructions to draft an Ordinance banning plastic carryout bags and complete any review required by CEQA

LA County Efforts

- ❖ County also sponsored and/or supported legislation to establish a fee or ban single use plastic carryout bags, beginning with Assembly Bill 2829 (2008, Davis) up to the most recent legislation - Assembly Bill 1998 (2010, Julia Brownley)
- ❖ These legislative efforts were supported by a diverse coalition:
 - ✓ Local governments
 - ✓ Environmental organizations
 - ✓ Grocers
 - ✓ Industry
 - ✓ L.A. County Integrated Waste Management Task Force
 - ✓ LA County Board of Supervisors
 - ✓ 145 other organizations including stores, labor unions, and government officials

Economic Impacts of Plastic Bag Ordinance

- County conducted an independent study of the potential socio-economic impacts of the Ordinance
 - Major finding: average expected cost to residents is \$5.72 per year
- Likely a positive impact for stores:
 - Reduced transportation and warehousing costs
 - No longer need to provide “free” bags
 - Cost savings can be passed on to consumers

Economic Impacts of Plastic Bag Ordinance

- Additional Key Findings:
 - The inclusion of the 10 cent fee on paper bags is expected to have a measurable impact on consumer behavior and encourage most customers use reusable bags or to avoid using any bags.
 - As a result, the impact of the proposed ordinance on lower-income residents of the County is expected to be negligible, since most of these customers will avoid the 10 cent charge by bringing their own bag or avoiding a bag.

Findings

- Reducing bag litter can result in significant cost savings to taxpayers
 - The RWQCB imposed a zero trash TMDL
 - Ballona Creek watershed
 - LA River watershed
 - O & M costs to the County and other agencies is expected to substantially increase in coming years
 - The RWQCB has recognized that ordinances restricting single use plastic bags can help achieve these goals.

Findings

- Accelerating the use of reusable bags has multiple opportunities to add value:
 - Reducing litter
 - Improve recreational experiences and quality of life
 - Reduce negative impacts on wildlife
 - Improve tourism
 - Reducing hidden costs to consumers
 - Up to \$18/yr for plastic bags vs. \$4/yr for reusable bags
 - Encouraging green jobs manufacturing reusable bags



Findings

- Conserve energy and natural resources
 - Generates less waste
 - Consumes fewer natural resources
 - Generates less air/water pollution from:
 - Manufacturing
 - Transportation
 - Recycling/disposal processes
- Invite citizens to actively participate in practices that promote a clean and sustainable environment

Conclusions

- ❖ Ban provides a **net benefit** economically and environmentally, saving taxpayer funds
- ❖ Fee on paper bags provides **choice to customer**, results in negligible impact to most customers while mitigating potential for increased environmental impacts from single use paper bags
- ❖ **Regional consistency** is vital to enhancing effectiveness and minimizing confusion among residents
 - ❖ *We encourage you to become a participant in this effort, through AboutTheBag.com*