

# B.Y.O.B. – Bring Your Own Bag

## Save Money & Our Environment

*When asked: “Paper or Plastic?”  
Just say: “I brought my own.”*

Disposable grocery bags have become a habit for consumers across the world. Yet, disposable plastic bags devastate our environment and pollute our waterways. Plastic bags clog storm drains and sewers, and pollute our streets, parks, and beaches. Eventually they make their way into rivers, estuaries, lakes, bays, and oceans where they endanger and kill marine life.

American consumption of disposable plastic shopping bags totaled approximately 102 billion in 2008.<sup>i</sup> With an estimated population of 310 million residents, each American uses 330 disposable plastic bags each year. Since the inception of the plastic baggie in the 1950's, our society has become increasingly reliant on plastic bags.



### BRIEF HISTORY OF DISPOSABLE PLASTIC BAGS

- 1957 First plastic bags produced for sandwiches
- 1966 Bread packaging is from 25 to 30 percent plastic
- 1969 New York City begins collecting municipal garbage in plastic bags
- 1974 Large consumer stores start switching to plastic shopping bags
- 1977 Supermarkets start switching from paper to plastic
- 1994 Denmark implements first surcharge on plastic bags
- 1996 Four out of five grocery bags are plastic
- 2002 Ireland introduces the world's first consumer paid plastic bag fee

**It's time to break the plastic bag habitat and BYOB—Bring Your Own Bag.**

### Plastic Bag Impacts to Our Environment

The 100 billion plastic bags thrown away by Americans every year have significant impacts on our environment and marine life. Plastics do not biodegrade, but rather photodegrade, meaning that the plastics break into smaller pieces from exposure to UV light. It is estimated that plastic bags take 1,000 years to break down, if at all. <sup>ii</sup>

### Plastic in our Oceans

The mass consumption of plastic products has created a plastic wasteland in our oceans. Plastic pollution is carried from local streets with storm water to creeks and rivers, eventually reaching the ocean. Ocean currents, combined with large amounts of floating plastic waste, have resulted in several swirling plastic waste vortexes that, in the Pacific Ocean, span thousands of square miles.

These areas are now referred to as “plastic islands.” Test samples have documented plastic in every single sample and many contained significant quantities of marine debris, most of which was plastic. As research continues, it is being realized that the amount of plastic in our oceans is significantly larger than first presumed. <sup>iii</sup>

### FACTS ABOUT PLASTIC BAGS

- ✓ Every hour, approximately 200,000 plastic bags are land filled.
- ✓ Plastic resin production has doubled in the past 20 years from 60 billion to 120 billion pounds.
- ✓ In the U.S. half a million plastic bags are used every minute.
- ✓ The average family uses about 60 plastic grocery bags every month.
- ✓ The plastic bag has an average lifespan of 12 minutes.
- ✓ 225 million tons of plastic are produced annually world wide.
- ✓ According to the EPA, between 500 billion and 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed worldwide each year.

The International Coastal Clean-up reported that in the last several years, plastic bags were second only to cigarette butts as the most common debris item collected on beaches worldwide. Plastic bag pollution continues to grow. From 2008 to 2009, the US saw an increase of 16% more plastic bags collected in coastal cleanups. Yet, countries that have committed to reducing plastic bags saw plastic bag debris significantly drop. Ireland, which implemented a plastic bag fee in 2002, found only 499 along its coast, while neighboring UK retrieved 8,633 plastic bags along its coast. In the same year, the U.S. plastic bag total was an astonishing and embarrassing 268,166. <sup>iv</sup>

### Plastic Bags Kill Wildlife

Plastic waste in waterways threatens and kills fish and wildlife. Marine animals often mistake plastic bags for naturally occurring food sources, such as jellyfish. Once eaten, the bags cannot be digested

resulting in starvation. According to a recent report, at least 267 different species of marine life are adversely affected by plastic bag pollution and countless numbers of whales, birds, seals, and turtles are killed annually from plastic bags<sup>v</sup>. Fish and wildlife mortalities can be caused not only when species ingest the bags, but also when they become entangled in them, causing strangulation and restricted mobility. Since plastic bags do not biodegrade, once the animal dies, the plastic bags will be re-released in the environment destined to repeat this tragic reality.



### Plastics Bags Are Unsustainable

Plastic bags are made from petroleum and natural gas. The energy used in the production and transportation of the bags results in further natural resource consumption and increased greenhouse gas emissions.

### Plastic Bags Cause Infrastructure Failure

When released on our streets and neighborhoods, plastic bags are washed towards storm drains during rain events. Since plastic bags are malleable they easily spread out over the storm drains, creating a thin membrane that traps leaves and debris. This prevents water from entering the storm drain, causing localized flooding. When investigating the devastating floods that occurred in Bangladesh in 1988 and 1998 that submerged two thirds of the country, plastic bags were

found to be the main culprit.<sup>v</sup>Since Bangladesh banned plastic bags in 2002, there have been no floods of that caliber.

## Solution to Plastic Bag Pollution

Reliance upon disposable plastic bags is unsustainable and unnecessary. The good news is that using reusable bags is simple, sustainable, and fashionable. Bringing your own shopping bag decreases pollution. Every reusable bag can prevent 1,000 plastic bags from entering our environment.



## Reusable Bags Save Money

Bringing your own bag can save money on grocery bills. Many grocery stores are already implementing policies encouraging the use of reusable bags. Stop and Shop will refund .05 cents for every reusable bag used, Waldbaums and Pathmark refunds .02 cents and stores like Whole Foods will give .10 cents. Reducing both paper and plastic bags also saves money for grocery stores too. Grocery stores pay approximately 1.5 cents for each plastic bag, and typically more for paper bags.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Bring your own bags and encourage others to do the same.
- Write to your elected officials—tell them to incentivize reusable bags.

Bringing Your Own Bag will have a meaningful impact on our environment. Together we can achieve cleaner roads, parks, beaches and communities. We can save the lives of marine mammals, particularly those that have returned to some of our waterways such as dolphins and seals in the Long Island Sound.

## Examples of Government Actions to Reduce Plastic Bag Use

Municipalities across the nation and the world are seeking innovative and common sense ways to reduce plastic bags. The following bans and fees mark good progress towards encouraging reusable shopping bags and reducing plastic waste into our environment.

### Ireland

In 2002, Ireland implemented a 30 cent surcharge on plastic bags. Since implementation, consumption has dramatically reduced, resulting in a 90% decrease in plastic bag use. This equals eliminating 1 billion plastic bags annually.

### Italy

The first country to ban plastic bags completely. Ban took effect in January 2011.

### Westport, CT

Westport was the first East Coast municipality to ban plastic bags. This took effect September 2008. Consumer use of reusable bags has increased 70% since the ban, resulting in a reduction of 600,000 bags annually.

### Washington, DC

Washington, D.C. implemented a 5 cent charge on plastic bags in January 2010. Within weeks of implementation some stores reported reductions of 6,000 bags per week and others reduced bag supply from 12,000 cases per week to 6 cases. Before the charge, D.C. consumers used 22.5 million bags each month. After the first month it was 3 million, a reduction of 86%.



## San Francisco, California

San Francisco was the first major city to ban plastic bags. San Francisco banned the use of plastic bags in supermarkets and chain drugstores. Since 2007, San Francisco has removed 100 million plastic bags from the waste stream. San Francisco is currently debating expanding the law to ban plastic bags at all retailers and adding a 10 cent fee to paper bags.



## Toronto, Canada

Toronto is the only city in Canada to institute a surcharge on plastic bags. The city's fee is 5 cents and within 3 weeks of implementation Canada's largest grocer reported a 75% drop in plastic bags.

## China

China outlawed the free distribution of plastic bags in 2008. China banned super-thin bags and charges a fee for other plastic bags. The Worldwatch Institute reported that after two years China's plastic bag consumption has decreased 50%, an estimated 100 billion plastic bags.

**North Carolina** – passed the Plastic Bag Management Law in September 2009, banning plastic bags around the Outer Banks.

## More Plastic Bag Legislation

Los Angeles County, CA  
Long Beach, CA,  
San Jose, CA  
Fairfax, CA  
Malibu, CA  
Palo Alto, CA  
Maui & Kauai, HI  
Telluride, Colorado  
Mexico City, Mexico  
Sious Lookout, Ontario, Canada  
Edmonds, Washington  
Outer Banks, North Carolina  
Brownsville, Texas  
Taiwan  
South Africa

### Long Island/ Metro New York

225a Main Street  
Farmingdale, NY  
(516) 390-7150

### Hudson Valley

188 East Post Road  
Suite 404  
White Plains, NY 10601  
(914) 358-9840

### Capital Region/North Country

744 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12207  
(518) 772-1862



### Central New York/ Finger Lakes

466 Westcott Street, 2nd Floor  
Syracuse, NY 13210  
(315) 472-1339

### Western New York/Southern Tier

735 Delaware Road, Box 140  
Buffalo, NY 14223  
(716) 831-3206

### Connecticut

2404 Whitney Ave  
Hamden, CT 06518  
(203) 821-7050

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<sup>i</sup> U.S. International Trade Commission, *Polyethylene Retail Carrier Bags from Indonesia, Taiwan, and Vietnam*, Publication 4080, Washington, DC, May, 2009. p. 1-2.

[http://www.usitc.gov/publications/701\\_731/pub4080.pdf](http://www.usitc.gov/publications/701_731/pub4080.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> 2009. Algalita Marine Research Foundation. *FAQ*. <http://www.algalita.org/AlgalitaFAQs.htm#photo>

<sup>iii</sup> Lorena M. Rios, Patrick R. Jones, Charles Moore, and Urja V. Narayan. 2010. *Quantitation of persistent organic pollutants adsorbed on plastic debris from the Northern Pacific Gyre's "eastern garbage patch"*. *Journal of Environmental Monitoring*, Volume 12, 2226–2236

<sup>iv</sup> Ocean Conservancy. 2010. *Trash Travels; International Coastal Cleanup 2010 Report*.

<sup>v</sup> Allsopp, Walters, Santillo, and Johnston, *Plastic Debris in the World's Oceans*, Greenpeace, p. 13.

<sup>vi</sup> BBC News, *Planet Earth's New Nemesis?*, Wednesday, May 8, 2002.