



# Tell Fort Worth Officials: Bag the Bags

## *Support local ordinance to phase out single-use checkout bags*

On an average day, Fort Worth retailers distribute over *650,000* single-use plastic checkout bags. While there are limited recycling options available in some grocery stores, more than 80% of these bags will end up as garbage or littering our streets and green spaces. When they end up in landfills or in our creeks, rivers, lakes and oceans, their lifespan is *forever*; they never fully biodegrade. And in some ways, single-use paper bags have an even greater impact on the environment due to the resources used to create them. Single-use checkout bags have been estimated to cost Texas taxpayers up to \$25 million per year in clean-up costs, and that doesn't count the incalculable costs of damage to ecosystems and wildlife.

### Subsidizing Pollution?

Our local tax dollars are currently being spent to address the problems caused by this wasteful product: litter cleanup, clogged storm drains and water treatment plants, and delays at regional recycling facilities. This amounts to a public subsidy we pay to clean up the inevitable mess. Fort Worth needs a policy to save taxpayer money, not waste it.

Cities all over Texas have phased out single-use checkout bags, but industry lobbyists argue for voluntary programs instead. Retailers often promise to provide recycling bins at all stores and encourage their customers to bring their own reusable shopping bags. However, all the Texas cities that have tried this have admitted that voluntary programs failed to reduce bag consumption and waste. This pattern has been repeated in Dallas, San Antonio and Austin. The only policies which have worked to meaningfully address bag pollution are single-use bag bans and fees. Worldwide, 25% of the global population now lives in cities, states or countries that have banned or established fees for single-use bags.

### Texas Takes Action on Single-Use Bags

Cities and towns both large and small across Texas have also taken action to fight single-use bag pollution. Brownsville, South Padre Island, Fort Stockton, Laguna Vista, Austin, Sunset Valley and Freer have all passed ordinances either banning or creating fees for single-use bags. Dallas, Corpus Christi, Laredo and San Antonio are considering ordinances as well. Now Fort Worth officials have begun considering whether to phase out single-use bags here. If Fort Worth and the other cities considering it take action now, nearly 20% of all Texas residents will live in cities that have enacted bag bans or fees. Collectively, that will reduce bag consumption and waste by *billions* of bags each year.

Cities which have taken this step are already reaping the benefits. Just a few months after enacting its ordinance, Austin's preliminary litter surveys have found that single-use plastic bags are now "virtually non-existent" during their right of way clean-ups and street cleaning. They anticipate being able to use the money they're saving to expand litter reduction efforts into more parts of the city. It's past time for Fort Worth to stop subsidizing waste and benefit its residents as well!



*"Plastic ingestion is one real killer of cattle today with almost no known cure... It is just a quiet and painful way for cattle to die with several difficult symptoms to confuse the issue."* – **International Texas Longhorn Association**

# From Disposable to Reusable

The reusable bag proposal would require retailers to stop distributing all single-use checkout bags, paper and plastic. Instead, retailers would be allowed to sell or give away fully reusable bags, made of any material. Any type of bag that meets certain thickness and durability standards would be allowed. In that sense, it's not really a plastic bag ban—it's a paper and plastic bag durability standard. The idea is to eliminate the thin, flimsy "disposable" checkout bags that cause so many problems and cost taxpayer money to clean up.

## ***Exemptions to protect public health***

Any bags used for meat, dairy, produce or bulk foods inside grocery stores would be exempt. Customers would never be forced to put unpackaged food directly into a reusable bag. For similar reasons, all fast food and

restaurant bags that are used for food and liquids would be exempt. Food should always be packaged safely. In addition, this proposal is aimed at checkout shopping bags, not food, newspaper or dry cleaning bags. Many people use shopping bags at home as trash can liners or for pet waste, and there will still be plenty of bags available for this purpose.

## ***Reusable bags are safe, sustainable***

Plastic bag manufacturers and their lobbyists claim that reusable bags harbor bacteria and can make people sick. However, even the industry-funded study they cite as evidence actually shows just the opposite: No harmful bacteria strains were found on the bags they tested. Industry also claims their bags are recyclable, but by definition, reusable bags are far more sustainable than products designed for one-time use. After all, ***reduction and reuse*** are even more important than recycling!

## **Tell Your Local Politicians to Take Action**

Citizen pressure will be needed to convince the Fort Worth City Council to pass this ordinance. Write your letters to local elected officials tonight! With your help, Fort Worth can stake its claim as an environmental leader.



Write a personalized letter to Mayor Betsy Price as well as your City Council member. Address two separate letters to:

**Mayor Betsy Price**  
**Fort Worth City Hall**  
**1000 Throckmorton St.**  
**Fort Worth, TX 76102**

**Councilmember \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Fort Worth City Hall**  
**1000 Throckmorton St.**  
**Fort Worth, TX 76102**

### ***Points to include could be:***

Why do you support phasing out disposable, single-use checkout bags? Do you think Fort Worth should join other Texas cities in taking this step? Let them know that you want a greener, cleaner city.

Do you think it's fair that local taxpayers have to pay to clean up single-use bag pollution? Ask them to help save your tax dollars .

Beyond saving money, reducing litter and pollution would attract more visitors and residents. Encourage Mayor Price to include this as a Steer Fort Worth project in 2014.

Do you think retailers should be allowed to voluntarily try to recycle and reduce pollution without any stronger measures? Let them know this approach has been tried and has failed repeatedly.

Check out the Greater Fort Worth Sierra Club's online petition: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/622/890/475/support-a-single-use-plastic-bag-ban/>

Lookup the Greater Fort Worth Sierra Club on [facebook](#), [Meetup](#), and our [website](#).