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Single Use Bag Ordinances in Texas: Basic Facts

Bag Pollution Forces Costs onto Local Taxpayers

- Americans consume an estimated 335 plastic bags per person per year.¹
- Single-use bag pollution costs local governments are \$0.40-\$0.98 per person per year.

Environmental Impacts are Widespread

- Plastic bags affect wildlife and our springs, rivers, gulf and oceans and the costs on unquantifiable.
- 11% of all marine debris collected on International Coastal Cleanup Day in 2009 was plastic bags. More than 1.1 million of them.
- Analyses of dead sea turtles in South Padre Island revealed that they ingested plastic bags.

“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*

Paper or Plastic Bags: Neither

- Each year the US consumes 10 billion paper grocery bags, requiring 14 million trees.
- Manufacturing paper bags emits 80% more greenhouse gases than plastic bags and creates 50 times more water pollution.
- In communities that have only banned plastic bags, paper bag use has greatly increased.
- H-E-B supported the inclusion of both paper and plastic in the Austin ordinance, due to environmental impacts and the higher price of paper bags.

“I voted for Austin’s single-use bag ordinance because these bags were costing our city and voluntary efforts had failed to solve the problem. **Our Resource Recovery Department (Austin’s Solid Waste Management Department)** estimated that we were spending at least \$330,000 to \$805,000 every year on single-use bag pollution, including litter clean up, landfilling expenses and impacts to infrastructure....A voluntary program by retailers pledged to divert 50% of plastic bags from our landfills, but after 18 months they topped out at less than 27%. Now, just three months after implementation our Litter Abatement Division says that plastic grocery bags are “basically nonexistent” in their collections. We are looking forward to the money we’ll save, and already our city looks better.”

Voluntary Programs Fail to Deliver

Promised Results and Delay Passage of Effective Ordinances

- A voluntary program by retailers pledged to divert 50% of plastic bags from Austin’s landfills, but after 18 months they topped out at less than 27%.
- Retailers then promised a 25% decrease in the distribution of bags in a voluntary effort in San Antonio, but single-use bag distribution did not decrease at all.

Ordinances on Single-Use Bags Have Passed and Are Working Across Texas

- Eight communities in South, West and Central Texas have passed single-use bag ordinances. The first was Brownsville and others include Ft. Stockton, South Padre Island, Austin, Laguna Vista, Freer, Sunset Valley and Kermit.
- The Fort Stockton City Manager Raul Rodriguez says, “The ordinance works very well, we’ve seen a huge litter reduction impact, and residents are pleased.”

¹ 2009 U.S. International Trade Commission’s *Polyethylene Retail Carrier Bags from Indonesia, Taiwan, and Vietnam* May 2009 Report

- In Austin, 99.5% of HEBs customers in Austin (more than 1 million per day) made the switch to reusable bags in the first 6 months, according to reports filed by HEB with the City of Austin.
- According to Freer Mayor Andy Bierstadt, “The oil boom has caused a huge increase in traffic and our litter was out of control. We were seen as a ‘dirty city,’ and this was hurting new business. This made an immediate, huge difference in litter clean-up.”

There is No Credible Evidence That Reusable Bags Cause Illness

- The 2011 industry-funded study most often cited found that reusable bags tested positive for e. coli and other bacteria. However, none of the bacteria it found on the bags were strains which would normally make people sick. Michael Hansen, senior staff scientist with the Consumer Union said *“A person eating an average bag of salad greens gets more exposure to these bacteria than if they had licked the insides of the dirtiest bag from this study.”*
- Another commonly cited case deals with an outbreak of the Norovirus among a girls’ soccer team in Oregon in 2010. The girls ate cookies that had been in this bag while it was in a bathroom where someone was getting sick. This exposure was the source of the Norovirus that was later found on the bag—just as it would have been found on a plastic or paper bag, a cardboard box or any other container they had used instead of the reusable bag.
- The latest, most sensational study claims that single-use bag ordinances led to higher levels of hospitalization and death from intestinal disease in San Francisco. Tomas J. Aragon, MD, DrPH, Health Officer for the City of San Francisco notes that the study makes claims which are *“not warranted,”* and that when one excludes increases in particular intestinal illnesses which are seeing a global, unexplained rise unconnected to any local ordinances there is no evidence that any increase in intestinal illness at all has occurred.

The Claim that Litter Increased After a Bag Ordinance Passed is False

- State Rep. Drew Springer who introduced a measure to pre-empt local bag ordinances, stated that bag litter increased after San Francisco passed its ordinance. However, this claim was based on a single litter audit done before the ban took full effect which found only two more plastic check-out bags than the previous year’s audit. Subsequent litter audits did not find an increase in bags.

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For information on how to help with our Bag Ban Initiative, please email John MacFarlane of the Greater Fort Worth Sierra Club at fw.sierra.excom@gmail.com

To sign the petition:

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/622/890/475/support-a-single-use-plastic-bag-ban/>