



Statement

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NORTH CAROLINA BAG DEBATE IGNORES ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

State Senator Seeks to Outlaw Plastic Carryout Bags in Three Counties

Arlington, VA (June 9, 2009) – Lawmakers in Raleigh are attempting to bypass local businesses and consumers in an effort to outlaw plastic carryout bags in three North Carolina barrier island counties. Without fully considering the environmental or economic impacts of the legislation, the State Senate adopted the measure two weeks ago.

Today, the North Carolina House Environment and Natural Resources Committee is hearing a proposal supported by Senate President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight that effectively would ban any plastic carryout bags at retail stores in Currituck, Dare and Hyde Counties. If the measure passes, tourists and local shoppers in those counties would need to bring or buy enough reusable bags every shopping trip or carry out all groceries and restaurant meals without any bags. And tourist beachgoers will no doubt be disappointed to find no free bags available to tote their lunch to the beach or wet swimwear, lunch leftovers and trash back from the beach.

While the proposal allows bags made from 100 percent post consumer recycled paper, retailers report that they are unaware of the existence of such bags. Plastic bag makers also point out that banning carryout bags would shut down recycling opportunities for a whole host of plastic products.

“Shoppers today can bring plastic bags and wraps to grocery stores for recycling – shopping bags, dry-cleaning bags, bread bags, and wraps from paper towels and bathroom tissue, even plastic bags used to deliver newspapers,” said Shari Jackson of the Progressive Bag Affiliates. “This bill would eliminate recycling opportunities not only for bags, but for all of the other plastics that are recycled with bags.”

Jackson also objected to unsubstantiated statements in the bill about the environmental impact of plastic bags. “Plastic bags use 50 percent less energy, generate 70 percent less emissions and create 80 percent less waste than paper alternatives.

“Other jurisdictions that have looked at this issue have chosen to expand recycling opportunities as the best way to fight litter and protect the environment,” Jackson said.

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Jackson offered to work with state officials and local retailers to develop statewide programs to increase recycling, reduce litter and improve the environment. She pointed out that recycling legislation in New York, California, Rhode Island and cities across the country is expected to increase significantly the amount of plastic bags and wraps that are diverted from landfills and turned into new consumer products, such as durable decking, fencing, railings, shopping carts and new bags.

Grocers, retailers and public officials across the country have partnered with the Progressive Bag Affiliates to promote in-store recycling programs for plastic bags and wraps. Public-private partnerships and education have been key factors in increasing consumer participation in plastic bag recycling programs.

Members of ACC's Progressive Bag Affiliates – the nation's four leading makers of plastic carryout bags – recently announced a landmark recycling goal of 40 percent recycled content, including 25 percent postconsumer material, in all plastic bags by 2015. When fully implemented, the [Full Circle Recycling Initiative](#) will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 463 million pounds, conserve enough energy (mainly natural gas) to heat 200,000 homes, and reduce waste by 300 million pounds every year.

About the Progressive Bag Affiliates

The Progressive Bag Affiliates of the American Chemistry Council promote the responsible use and recycling of plastic carryout bags. The PBA recycling toolkit is being used by retailers around the nation as a reference for determining the best ways to deploy effective recycling solutions in stores. For more information, please visit www.plasticbagrecycling.org.

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