



THE MAJOR MYTHS BEHIND PROPOSED BANS ON PLASTIC BAGS

1. MYTH: San Francisco banned plastic bags and so should our city.

REALITY: San Francisco is the only significant jurisdiction in the nation that currently bans plastic bags and that law has caused a shift back to paper bags. Switching back to paper bags increases greenhouse gas emissions, energy use and waste.¹ As other major cities like New York and Chicago investigate the plastic bag issue, they have chosen plastic bag recycling for their communities. Communities wishing to emulate San Francisco should also understand that San Francisco is one of a handful of communities in the country that has collection of compostable materials including biodegradable plastic bags which was a stated intent of the San Francisco legislation.

2. MYTH: Our city would be saving so much oil by banning plastic bags.

REALITY: In the United States, nearly 80% of the raw material used to make plastic bags is produced from North American natural gas, not oil.² This includes feedstock, process and transportation energy. Much of the energy used to make plastic bags is embodied in the bag itself, and since plastic bags are fully recyclable, that energy is available for new products. Alternatives also use twice as much energy to make – thus banning plastic bags would increase overall energy use and perhaps oil use.

3. MYTH: Our city would be solving its litter problem by banning plastic bags.

REALITY: In effect, banning recyclable plastic bags will not significantly reduce litter or the amount of waste in our sewers and landfills. Litter problems must be addressed directly by targeting littering and providing recycling and waste bins. Banning a certain product will only cause a switch from one form of litter to another. There is no such thing as environmentally preferable litter. Such approaches merely create new problems.

4. MYTH: Many other cities are banning plastics bags because that is now the trend.

REALITY: Nationwide, the prevailing legislative trend is overwhelmingly toward plastic bag recycling. From coast to coast – Los Angeles to New York

¹ Boustead Consulting, "Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags - Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper," 2007, http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_plastics/doc.asp?CID=1106&DID=7212

² US Department of Energy, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, US Life Cycle Inventory Database, <http://www.nrel.gov/lci/>



and now Chicago – cities are moving forward to promote plastic bag recycling. San Francisco remains the only city in the nation that currently enforces a ban on plastic bags.

Plastic grocery bags are fully recyclable and the number of recycling programs is increasing daily. In 2006, plastic bag recycling increased 24% nationwide to 812 million pounds. There is a growing realization that plastic is a valuable resource.³ Plastic bags can be made into dozens of useful new products, such as building and construction products, low-maintenance fencing and decking, and of course, new bags. There is high demand for this material, and in most areas, demand exceeds the available supply because many consumers are not aware that collection programs are available at local stores.

In recent years, many grocers and retailers have introduced plastic bag collection programs. Consumers should look for a collection bin, usually located at the front of the store. The number of municipal drop-off centers and curbside programs to recycle plastic bags is increasing also.

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³ Moore Recycling Associates, Inc. and American Chemistry Council, [2006 National Post-Consumer Recycled Plastic Bag and Film Report](http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_plastics/doc.asp?CID=1593&DID=7140), 2007
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