

Bag the Plastic Bag Ban!

The need to end the use of single-use plastic bags is vital to the long term health of our water and planet.

Plastics are made up of roughly 13,000 different chemicals, with 3,200 of those being listed as chemicals of concern. Health impacts from the chemicals in plastic include cardiovascular disease and stroke, infertility, cancer, thyroid problems, obesity, diabetes, and more.

In 2015, the Minneapolis City Council took steps to ban the use of plastic bags at grocery and retail stores in Minneapolis in an effort to reduce plastic pollution. Unfortunately, despite passage of the ordinance in 2016, the legislature took action in 2017 and passed language prohibiting cities from banning the use of plastic/disposable bags. Currently, Minneapolis and Duluth both charge a 5 cent fee for plastic bags within their city limits in an effort to encourage the use of reusable bags.

Local municipalities deserve the right to local control, especially when the decisions in question impact public health and safety and the water we drink. Clean Water Action is working to remove the plastic bag ban preemption in Minnesota statute, which will return local control around this issue back to where it belongs — with each city and town in Minnesota.

Americans use 100 billion plastic bags a year, which require 12 million barrels of oil to manufacture. Minnesotans throw away more than 500 tons of plastic bags and packaging every day. The MPCA states that in Minnesota plastic bag recycling is less than 10%. It is estimated that 22 million pounds of plastic pollution enter the Great Lakes annually.

Environmental Impact

- Americans use an average of 365 plastic bags per person per year compared to people in Denmark, who use an average of four plastic bags per year.
- It only takes about 14 plastic bags for the equivalent of the gas required to drive one mile.
- In 2015 about 730,000 tons of plastic bags, sacks and wraps were generated (including PS, PP, HDPE, PVC & LDPE) in the U.S., but more than 87% of those items are never recycled, winding up in landfills and the water.
- It takes 1,000 years for a plastic bag to degrade in a landfill. Unfortunately, the bags don't break down completely but instead photo-degrade, becoming microplastics that absorb toxins and continue to pollute the environment.
- The plastic typically used in bottles, bags and food containers contains chemical additives such as endocrine disruptors, which are associated with negative health effects including cancers, birth defects and immune system suppression in humans and wildlife.
- Chemical leachates from plastic bags impair the growth of the world's most important microorganisms, *Prochlorococcus*, a marine bacterium that provides one tenth of the world's oxygen.
- Trash incinerators, where plastic bags end up pose an environmental threat. Emitted toxics include arsenic, chromium, and particulate matter into nearby communities.
- The Hennepin County Energy Recovery Center (HERC) is an environmental justice tragedy, impacting the community where the majority of residents are people of color, and an area already exposed to a disproportionate level of airborne toxics. Some of those toxics come from burning plastic, according to the Five Cities report, since about 88% of all plastic in Minneapolis ends up in the trash.



Costs of Maintaining the Status Quo

Eureka, a third-party recycling contractor, states that countless hours and an estimated \$75,000 per year is spent sorting out and disposing of plastic bags, which can get caught in the facility's sorting axles and even catch fire. Black plastics are not recyclable because laser readers used to sort materials can't determine which type of plastics they are, and they have a lower resale value on the market which end up in landfills and incinerators.

One study estimated the cost of clean-up and landfill at 17 cents per bag. The graphic at right shows how they calculated the cost per bag for the 50 million bags used in that city per year. These costs are similar across the U.S.

Local Control

Local governments are elected officials. Their decisions and the work they do matters to the community that elects them. Taking the power of local control away from municipal governments lessens the voice of those who live in the community.

Join us in reducing plastic waste, protecting our water, and supporting local control across Minnesota.

Learn more at cleanwater.org/MNplasticbags.

Sources:

1. https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/sustainability/plastic_bag_facts.html
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3. <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/do-plastic-bag-bans-work>
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5. <https://www.startribune.com/state-s-pollution-fighters-hope-bagnado-whips-up-storm-of-consciousness-at-state-fair/322561431/>



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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