

STUDENT GOVERNMENT DAY
STAFF REPORT

Student Council Agenda
Meeting of October 8, 2010

To: *Zoe Tinseth*, Student City Manager

From: *EOR*, Environmental Services Director

Date: October 4, 2010

Re: Consider ban on plastic bags in Arcata

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council tax single-used bags for grocery stores, drug stores, hardware stores, and supermarkets.

INTRODUCTION

Plastic bags pose a severe threat to our environment. The excessive use at grocery stores, drug stores, hardware stores, and supermarkets, should be limited. Putting a tax on disposable bags would give buyers the incentive to bring their own reusable bags which would profit the businesses as well as the environment. Some plastic bags would still be available at the stores for a small price in case customers forget to bring their own. Several countries and cities have already successfully implemented this change from plastic bags to re-usable bags; similarly this change would be beneficial to the city of Arcata.

DISCUSSION

This item has come before the City from many local citizens, recently 200 citizens submitted a petition to the city council to ban single-used bags. Concerns on this issue include:

- 30 billion plastic bags are used each year in the United States of the 500 billion plastic bags being used worldwide
- China and Mexico City among 40 other countries and municipalities around the world have already banned plastic bags
- San Francisco, Malibu, Fairfax, and Palo Alto have successfully banned plastic bag usage
- 2 billion are used in California each year
- 100,000 marine animals die each year by getting entangled in plastic
- Only 1% of plastic bags are recycled annually nationwide
- 5.3% of plastic bags are recycled in California
- In a landfill, plastic bags take up to 1,000 years to degrade, and their breakdown contaminates water, and soil, and when incinerated causes air pollution. In the ocean, plastic bags take 10 to 20 years to degrade; however, plastic never fully degrades.

- The production of plastic bags requires petroleum and often natural gas, both non-renewable resources that increase our dependency on foreign suppliers. Additionally, prospecting and drilling for these resources contributes to the destruction of fragile habitats and ecosystems around the world.
- The toxic chemical ingredients needed to make plastic produces pollution during the manufacturing process
- The energy needed to manufacture and transport disposable bags uses up more resources and creates global warming emissions.
- When retailers give away free bags, their costs are passed on to consumers in the form of higher prices.
- Putting a tax on single-used bags would increase the incentive of buyers to bring their own reusable bags, however if they forget them disposable bags are still available at the stores for a low price.

BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT

This policy does not affect the city's budget, as there are no costs to implement this change. If anything it would decrease the cost of businesses to buy the disposable bags, as US retailers pay an annual cost of \$4 billion for disposable bags.

ENVIRONMENTAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This policy supports the city council's goal of zero waste. Additionally the decrease in manufacturing of plastic bags would decrease landfill space and air pollution. This policy would lead to a friendlier environment.

View Videos on City Website at: <http://www.cityofarcata.org/node/846>

- [The Majestic Plastic Bag - A Mockumentary](#) - Narrated by Academy Award Winner - Jeremy Irons
- [A Seagull's Dream](#) - Arcata Elementary School's World Oceans Day marine debris art project and video.
- [Midway Atoll: "A View from Inside the Pacific Garbage Patch"](#) - Lecture by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist Greg Goldsmith, filmed at the Arcata Marsh, Earth Day April 22, 2010.

