

# Why Ban Single-Use Plastic Bags in California?

Approximately 8 million metric tons of plastic debris enters the world's oceans each year. The latest estimates say **there will be more plastic in the ocean than fish by 2050.**<sup>1</sup>

## Plastic bags waste taxpayer dollars.

- California state and local government spends roughly \$428 million annually to protect the Pacific Ocean and state waterways from litter. Between 8 and 25 percent of that cost is attributable to plastic bag waste.<sup>2</sup>
- In California, approximately 24 billion bags end up in landfills annually and managing that costs \$25 million dollars each year.<sup>3</sup>

## Plastic bag recycling is costly and ineffective.

- Recycling plastic bags does not make economic sense. One report found recycling one ton of plastic bags costs \$4,000. The recycled product can be sold for \$32.<sup>4</sup>
- Shopping bags jam expensive machinery at recycling plants and contaminate the recycling stream, increasing costs.<sup>5</sup> In the City of San Jose, plastic bag jams cost the city approximately \$1 million per year.<sup>6</sup>

## Bag bans work.

- Large stores covered by Los Angeles County's ban on plastic bags and ten-cent paper bag charge reduced overall single-use bag usage by 95%, which includes a 30% reduction in paper bag usage.<sup>7</sup>
- San Jose reduced plastic bag litter by 89% in the storm drain system, 60% in the creeks and rivers, and 59% in city streets and neighborhoods with a ban on plastic bags and a ten-cent paper bag charge. In addition, the average number of single-use bags decreased from 3 bags to 0.3 bags per visit.<sup>8</sup>
- 145 jurisdictions in California have now banned single-use plastic bags and placed a fee on paper bags.



*A mother sea otter tries to rescue her pup from a plastic bag in California.*

PHOTO BY TERRY MCCORMAC, 2011.

## Plastic bags harm marine and human life.

- At least 690 species are impacted by marine debris (mostly plastic); 10% of them had ingested microplastics.<sup>9</sup>
- Fish ingest plastic debris. Chemical additives in plastic and chemicals accumulated on the surface of the plastic (PCBs, PAHs, flame retardants) are transferred to fish tissue and can bioaccumulate up the food chain.<sup>10,11</sup>
- Fish sold in supermarkets contain plastic debris. A 2014 study of fish sold in U.S. and Indonesian supermarkets found plastic debris in 25% of all fish from U.S. supermarkets, including jack smelt, Pacific anchovies, yellowtail rockfish, striped bass, Chinook salmon, blue rockfish, Pacific sand dabs, lingcod, and Pacific oysters.<sup>12</sup>
- Ingestion of plastic debris by seabirds, fish, and sea turtles has been widely documented. Ingestion can cause suffocation or starvation; wildlife can also get entangled in plastic debris.

## California's waterways are filling with plastic.

- In the Los Angeles area alone, 10 metric tons of plastic fragments — like grocery bags, straws and soda bottles — are carried into the Pacific Ocean every day.<sup>13</sup>
- Nearly 4 million pieces of plastic flood the San Francisco Bay every day.<sup>14</sup>
- About 61% of street litter in the Bay Area is not captured or controlled by street sweeping and litter collection and ends up flowing into inland and coastal waters.<sup>15</sup>

## Single-use plastic bags are a major part of the problem.

- According to the California Coastal Commission, plastic bags comprise 13.5% of shoreline litter. The City of Los Angeles found that plastic bags made up 25% of litter in storm drains.<sup>16</sup>
- Californians use approximately 13 billion plastic bags each year and less than 5% are recycled.<sup>17</sup>

- The average time of use of a disposable bag is 12 minutes.<sup>18</sup>
- Because they are lightweight, plastic bags can often become litter. Even when properly disposed of, they fly out of open garbage containers and landfills.<sup>19</sup>

## Bag bans place the environment over profit for out-of-state bag manufacturers.

- California enacted a state-wide bag ban into law in 2014 (SB 270–Padilla). The law contained a job protection provision for workers in the few facilities where bags are manufactured in California.
- In California, the multi-million dollar “no” campaign against the bag ban is 98% funded by out-of-state firms, and the four largest funders are plastic bag manufacturers from South Carolina, New Jersey, and Texas.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.weforum.org/press/2016/01/more-plastic-than-fish-in-the-ocean-by-2050-report-offers-blueprint-for-change>

<sup>2</sup> NRDC, “Waste in Our Water: The Annual Cost to California Communities of Reducing Litter that Pollutes Our Waterways,” August 2013. [http://docs.nrdc.org/oceans/occe\\_13082701.asp](http://docs.nrdc.org/oceans/occe_13082701.asp)

<sup>3</sup> “Shopping? Take Reusable Bags!” CalRecycle. N.p., 23 Nov. 2011. Web. 13 June 2012. <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Clean Air Council. (2009 May). *Why Plastic Bag Fees Work*.

<sup>5</sup> Brendle Group. “Triple Bottom Line Evaluation: Plastic Bag Policy Options.” City of Fort Collins, October 2012, pg. 10.

<sup>6</sup> City of San Jose staff report, San Jose Transportation and Environment Committee Hearing, February 2, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> “Single Use Bag Ordinance, Los Angeles County, CA,” Green Cities California, January 27, 2013, [http://greencitiescalifornia.org/best-practices/waste-reduction/LA-co\\_single-use-bag.html](http://greencitiescalifornia.org/best-practices/waste-reduction/LA-co_single-use-bag.html)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/Archive/ViewFile/Item/2027> [http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203\\_d5.pdf](http://www3.sanjoseca.gov/clerk/CommitteeAgenda/TE/20121203/TE20121203_d5.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> S.C. Gail and R.C. Thompson, *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, Volume 92, Issues 1–2, 15 March 2015, Pages 170–179

<sup>10</sup> C. Rochman, et al, *Scientific Reports* 3, Article number: 3263 (2013)

<sup>11</sup> Hirai, H. et al. Organic micropollutants in marine plastic debris from the open ocean and remote and urban beaches. *Mar. Pollut. Bull.* 62, 1683–1692 (2011).

<sup>12</sup> Rochman, C.M., et al, Anthropogenic debris in seafood: Plastic debris and fibers from textiles in fish and bivalves sold for human consumption, *Sci Rep* 5, 14340 (2015).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/ocean\\_plastics/](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/campaigns/ocean_plastics/)

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sfei.org/documents/microplastic-contamination-san-francisco-bay>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/science/sciencenow/la-sci-sn-tons-of-plastic-trash-in-oceans-20150213-story.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www3.epa.gov/region9/marine-debris/faq.html>- last visited on December 8, 2015

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/publiced/holidays/ReusableBags.htm>- last accessed on December 8, 2015

<sup>18</sup> “Fighting the Tide of Plastic Bags in a World Awash with Waste” <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/asiapcf/07/13/eco.plasticbagwaste/index.html>

<sup>19</sup> Brendle Group. “Triple Bottom Line Evaluation: Plastic Bag Policy Options.” City of Fort Collins, October 2012, pg. 9.

<sup>20</sup> <http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/Campaign/Committees/Detail.aspx?id=1372902&view=late1&session=2015>



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