

# Environment



Despite common misconceptions, plastic bags are actually the most environmentally friendly option at checkout. They're 100% recyclable -- unlike some alternatives -- and studies show **banning plastic bags could increase global warming, put more carbon in the air, require more trucks on the road and use up more water** because consumers would be forced to use alternatives like paper and so-called "reusable" bags. Plus, studies show that taxes and bans don't prevent litter or keep plastic waste out of landfills.

Across the U.S., millions of people choose plastic bags to take items home from the store.

## *Plastic grocery bags are a greener option at checkout*

- Plastic bags require less resources to produce and transport than common alternatives
  - The plastic bag production uses less than 4% of the water needed to make paper bags<sup>i</sup>
  - Plastic grocery bags require 70% less energy to manufacture than paper bags.<sup>ii</sup>
  - For every seven trucks needed to deliver paper bags, one truck is needed for the same number of plastic bags<sup>iii</sup>
  - American plastic bags are made from natural gas, NOT foreign oil. In the U.S., 85% of the raw material used to make plastic bags is produced from natural gas.<sup>iv</sup> This means the U.S. plastic bag industry is helping our economy and reducing our dependence on foreign oil-producing nations
- The life cycle of paper and reusable bags has a significantly larger impact on the environment than plastic bags
  - A standard reusable cotton grocery bag must be reused 131 times "to ensure that they have lower global warming potential than" a single use of a plastic bag
  - It would take 7.5 years of using the same cloth bag (assuming one grocery trip per week) before it's a better option for the environment than a plastic bag reused three times<sup>v</sup>
  - Plastic bags generate 80% less waste than paper bags<sup>vi</sup>
  - 2,000 plastic bags weigh roughly 26 lbs as opposed to the 228 lbs 2,000 paper bags weigh<sup>vii</sup> -- taking up more landfill space

## *Bag bans and taxes don't reduce litter*

- Studies show that taxes and bans don't keep plastic litter out of the landfill. Without plastic grocery bags, people just purchase replacement bags—often made of thicker, heavier plastic—and then send those bags to the landfill, too.<sup>viii</sup>
- Plastic bags only make up a tiny fraction (less than 0.5 %) of the U.S. municipal solid waste stream<sup>ix</sup>
- According to a study by Keep America Beautiful, many items drive up litter more than plastic bags, including cigarette butts, food wrappers, cups and cans.<sup>x</sup> That's why banning bags won't address the larger litter problem

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<sup>i</sup> Boustead Consulting & Associates: “Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags—Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper,” 2007.

<sup>ii</sup> Franklin Associates, Ltd., “[Resource and Environmental Profile Analysis of Polyethylene and Unbleached Paper Grocery Sacks.](#)”

<sup>iii</sup> “RAN Encourages Plastic Bag Recycling;” Nevada News – April 2008; Retail Association of Nevada; <http://www.rannv.org/documents/8/April%202008.pdf> & Boustead Consulting & Associates: “[Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags—Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper.](#)” 2007.

<sup>iv</sup> Analysis by Chemical Market Associates, Inc.; February, 2011.

<sup>v</sup> U.K. Environmental Agency. “Life Cycle Assessment of Supermarket Carrier Bags.” February 2011.

[http://www.biodeg.org/files/uploaded/Carrier\\_Bags\\_Report\\_EA.pdf](http://www.biodeg.org/files/uploaded/Carrier_Bags_Report_EA.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> ABC News: [Paper or Plastic? Just the Facts.](#) 1/7/2006 & Boustead Consulting & Associates: “[Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags—Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper.](#)” 2007

<sup>vii</sup> ABC News: [Paper or Plastic? Just the Facts.](#) 1/7/2006 & Boustead Consulting & Associates: “[Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags—Recyclable Plastic; Compostable, Biodegradable Plastic; and Recycled, Recyclable Paper.](#)” 2007

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/1993102/31039> and <http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/bin-line-sales-double-nation-average-after-plastic-bag-ban/story-e6frea6u-1226119243127>

<sup>ix</sup> [Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: 2009 Facts and Figures](#); U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; p. 53

<sup>x</sup> “[Litter in America](#);” Keep America Beautiful; 2009