



Seattle's Plastic Bag Ban, the "Bellingham Model"

What's the Problem?

Washingtonians use more than 2 billion single-use plastic bags each year, and Seattle alone uses approximately 292 million plastic bags annually and only 13% are recycled. Too many plastic bags end up in Puget Sound where they do not biodegrade. Plastic bags break down into smaller and smaller pieces that remain hazardous as they are consumed by filter-feeders, shellfish, fish, turtles, marine mammals, and birds. PCB levels in Chinook salmon from Puget Sound are 3- to 5-times higher than any other West Coast populations. In 2010, a beached gray whale was found to have 20 plastic bags in its stomach!



Data source: [Keeping Plastics Out of Puget Sound, Environment Washington Report, November 2011](#)

How would the plastic bag ban work?

It's simple - retailers are prohibited from offering plastic carryout bags to customers. Paper bags may still be provided to customers for a minimum of five cents – stores keep the nickel to help cover the cost of providing bags. Everyone is encouraged to bring, sell and use reusable bags.

What bags?

- **Banned Bags Include:** plastic bags provided at checkout of all retail stores (bags less than 2.25 ml thick and made from non-renewable sources).
- **Exclusions:** bags used by shoppers in a store to package bulk foods, meat, flowers, bakery goods or prescriptions; newspaper, door hanger bags and dry cleaning bags.

What stores?

- **Where the policy applies:** all retail stores including but not limited to grocery stores, corner and convenience stores, pharmacies, department stores, farmers markets, restaurants and catering trucks.
- **Where it's not applicable:** for take-out food where there is a public health risk if a bag is not provided.

What about paper?

- Retailers may provide paper bags made of at least 40% recycled paper for a minimum 5 cent pass through cost that retailers keep to offset the cost of providing bags.
- Low income customers who qualify for food assistance programs shall be provided paper bags at no charge.

Joining cities on the West Coast and around the world

Seattle would join cities along the West Coast, hundreds of cities across the country and twenty nations worldwide that have already taken action to reduce the use of single use plastic bags.

San Francisco, CA

- Banned plastic bags in 2007

Los Angeles County

- Banned Plastic bags November 2010; includes a 10 cent fee on paper bags.

Portland, OR

- Banned plastic bags in summer 2011

Edmonds, WA

- Banned Plastic Bags in 2009; law was implemented in August 2010.

Bellingham, WA

- Banned plastic bags in 2011, in the model outlined in this document; legislation to be implement in summer 2012.

Washington DC

- Implemented a 5 cent fee on paper and plastic bags in 2009; reduced disposable bag use by 80% citywide in first year.

Background in Seattle

Approximately 292 million disposable bags are used in the City of Seattle annually. In 2008, the City Council passed an ordinance that would have placed a 20 cent fee on disposable plastic and paper bags at grocery, drug and convenience stores in an effort to reduce waste. The ordinance passed the Council in a 6-1 vote and then opposing parties collected enough signatures to refer the ordinance to the ballot, where it was overturned by the voters (53%-47%) in the November 2009 primary election. The American Chemistry Council spent over \$1.4 million opposing the law during the ballot measure campaign.



Questions?

Visit the website to learn more: <http://www.seattle.gov/council/obrien/bagban/>

Or contact Councilmember O'Brien's Legislative Assistant:
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