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Report: Analysis Finds Bag Bans Effective at Reducing Plastic Waste, Litter

January 19, 2024

Until recent decades, most shopping didn't involve single-use plastic bags. That could be the case again soon. Recently enacted plastic bag bans across the United States have proven that people can still shop without plastic bags – and benefit their communities by doing so.

Plastic Bag Bans Work, a new report released Thursday by U.S. PIRG Education Fund, Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group, estimates that, on average, plastic bag bans similar to those studied can eliminate almost 300 single-use plastic bags per person, per year. Studied bans have also reduced plastic bag litter by one-third or more and encouraged the use of more sustainable options.



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"The bottom line is that plastic bag bans work," said U.S. PIRG Education Fund President Faye Park. "People realize quickly it's easy to live without plastic bags and get used to bringing a bag from home or skipping a bag when they can. That means less waste and less litter. For our children to inherit a less polluted earth, that's exactly what we need."

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The report analyzed data from across the country and found that bans in just five locations (with a combined population of more than 12 million people) have cut single-use plastic bag consumption by about 6 billion bags per year – or enough to circle the earth 42 times.

As of 2021, more than 500 cities and towns across 28 states had a plastic bag ordinance in effect. Ten states – California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Vermont and Washington – had some form of statewide ban on single-use plastic bags as of 2023 and bans in Colorado and Rhode Island went into effect on the first day of 2024.

"Single-use plastic bags are constantly getting caught in our trees, lining our roadways and polluting our waterways, where they can harm wildlife," said Celeste Meiffren-Swango, Environment America Research & Policy Center's Beyond Plastic campaign director. "It's exciting to see cities and states taking action to reduce the use of this ubiquitous yet unnecessary product. We are seeing real results."



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passed a ban. The report found that in some places, a loophole allows businesses to replace thin plastic bags with thicker, allegedly "reusable," ones at checkout for a fee. However, many people only use these thicker bags once, too, before throwing them away. Because of this, in some areas with bans, the weight of plastic bag waste has increased even though the number of plastic bags distributed has declined.

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"Thicker plastic bags go against the intent of these laws. There's a simple fix – closing these loopholes," said Meiffren-Swango. "Nothing we use for just a few minutes should pollute the environment for centuries. We encourage cities and states to continue to pass bag bans so we can reduce plastic waste, cut down on litter and build a cleaner, greener future for everyone."

For more information, visit

<https://environmentamerica.org/center/resources/plastic-bag-bans-work/>.

Photo by Anna Shvets: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/plastic-bags-on-the-floor-3900505/>

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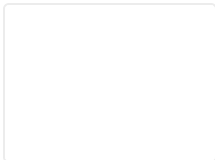
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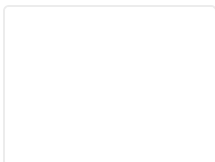


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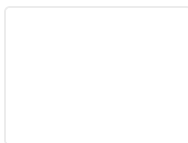
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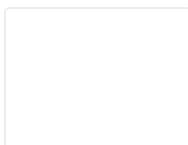
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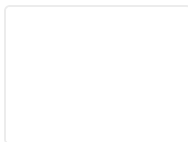
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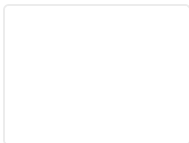


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