

The Plastic Bag Life Cycle

Posted by

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The Plastic Bag Life Cycle Coalition - Rachel S. Forbes - Much has been said about the proposal to consider a tax on plastic grocery bags. Many have criticized this movement with comments usually reserved for the most foul of government excesses. The plastic bag industry has basically said that there is no problem, and therefore no need to tax their product, because the "free" plastic bag fulfills a useful public service, but is the proposed "tax" really a tax? Is the "free" bag really free?

<http://plasticbaglifecycle.wikispaces.com/>

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Rachel S. Forbes

The Plastic Bag Life Cycle Coalition
October 10, 2006

It's [Waste Reduction Week in Canada](#) from October 16-22, 2006!

When we pay extra on our groceries for the convenience of a "free" bag it amounts to a hidden tax on our grocery bill, a tax that captures only the cost of purchasing and distributing the "free" bag. All the costs of collecting, processing, recycling and disposing of this material falls on the shoulders of the municipal taxpayer, to add insult to injury most stores charge for the "free" bag even if you bring your own. In a real sense those municipalities and individuals that wish to less wasteful, subsidize those who don't. This is just plain wrong.

What is being considered is a user fee or a life cycle charge, not a tax. Calling it a Waste Stream entry fee might be more accurate. What is being proposed would shift all the life cycle costs associated with the "free" bag directly to those who use them and at the same time fund research on badly needed alternatives.

Before we open another landfill or consider incineration we owe it to ourselves to examine our waste for ways to reduce or reuse as much material as we can. This is not good news to the plastic bag industry because it affects their business plan, a plan that needs easy access to our waste stream to be successful.

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Recycling plays a vital roll but it is the last "R." and should only be used if the first two fail. Reduce and Reuse will make our waste stream shrink. The concept of Zero Waste becomes an achievable goal if we apply a disciplined and creative approach to waste reduction that focuses on removing material from the waste stream before it enters.

The onus lies with the federal and provincial governments to give municipalities more tools to manage waste. This is where a life cycle charge fits in. It has proven to be the single most effective way of controlling the volume of plastic grocery bags entering our waste stream. Our present model, based on corporate and personal responsibility, hasn't worked and never will.

The Irish model has been very successful. Independent analysis shows that the consumers have embraced the new system and have adjusted well - 90% of the population now uses reusable bags.

It's time to recognize the negative effects of a product that is, quite simply, overused. Our goal as individuals, communities and businesses should be to reduce unnecessary waste in a responsible manner with the plastic bag industry as a willing partner.

Yours Truly,

The Plastic Bag Life Cycle Coalition

Our website/wikispace: <http://plasticbaglifecycle.wikispaces.com/>

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