

Stop The San Luis Obispo County Grocery Bag Tax and Ban

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On November 9, 2011, San Luis Obispo County Integrated Waste Management Authority (IWMA) will consider a proposed ordinance taxing paper bags and prohibiting free fully recyclable plastic bags at stores throughout the county.

Simply put, this proposal will raise grocery costs for families, impose yet another government burden on local businesses, cede local control from cities to an obscure regional governing body and weaken the recycling infrastructure – making it harder to recycle bags and films.

The Authority's plan will:

- Tax paper bags at no less than 10 cents each and force consumers to buy plastic bags for household use they now receive free.
- Harm consumers by raising grocery costs, disproportionately favoring large markets over smaller, family-owned grocers and could have the perverse impact of dismantling local recycling programs.
- Not allow cities to decide for themselves if this policy is right for those they represent and punish business violators with potential fines of \$1,000 per day and/or jail time.
- Replace consumer choice with another government mandate.
- Possibly violate provisions of Proposition 26, which was passed by California voters less than a year ago.

Will Hurt Struggling Families & Eliminates Consumer Choice

- High gas prices have already led to increased food prices at local grocery stores. This is just one more unneeded cost at the grocery store—consumers either have to pay for reusable bags if they forget to bring them or don't have enough, or pay at least 10 cents per paper bag every time they shop.
- Those on public assistance are NOT exempt, nor are those also experiencing financial hardships such as the unemployed, seniors, single parents and the working poor.
- Tourism impacted: San Luis Obispo County is home to a vibrant tourism industry – unsuspecting tourists, who typically don't carry multiple reusable bags, may be discouraged from impulse buys like souvenirs and other goods while travelling if they have to shell out for reusable and paper bags.
- Consumers will be denied the choice of a free bag that many prefer and seek out for other purposes (e.g., pet waste, trash can liners).
- Poor timing: The unemployment rate in San Luis Obispo County is in the double digits. It is hard to believe in this difficult jobs climate such an ordinance is being considered that will hurt consumers and businesses.
- Rather than allow local city and county governments to decide on a policy that best meets the needs of their respective residents, this ordinance has been advanced by an obscure government body without proper public review.

Won't Effectively Reduce Litter & have Unintended Consequences

- Blaming litter problems on plastic bags without looking at the data is just plain silly. Recent litter audits of other cities such as San Francisco show plastic bags represent just 0.6 percent of litter.
- We all agree that litter is blight in our communities, but there are better ways to reduce it, such as recycling and public education programs, which are serious solutions to the problem. Why penalize those who don't litter?

- Calling recyclable plastic carryout bags “single use” is just wrong. More than 90 percent of consumers re-use these bags for a variety of household purposes such as wastebasket liners and pet-waste bags – damp items for which they would otherwise need to buy plastic bags.
- Eliminating plastic carryout bags will just force consumers to purchase other, often more expensive, plastic bags to use for these purposes.

Will Hurt Small Businesses and Markets

- The ordinance will require stores to charge consumers for paper bags to help offset operating costs for providing those bags. Large stores can use their buying power to negotiate a lower price for bags—disproportionally favoring larger stores over small, “mom-and-pop” operations.
- This ordinance allows stores to “reuse their cardboard boxes by providing them to their customers for the purpose of carrying away goods.” But this costs businesses in two ways. First, it means stores may have heightened security costs to check receipts and inspect carts and bags at the door. Second, if they give the boxes away to shoppers, it means stores no longer get paid for recycling these cardboard boxes through third-party recyclers.
- Many stores – especially convenience stores – rely on impulse buys by customers. Sales could decrease since customers will not always have their reusable bags handy and will now be charged for so-called recyclable paper bags.
- The business models of convenience and liquor stores are not compatible with sales transactions requiring only the use of reusable bags. This disproportionately favors larger stores over small, “mom-and-pop” operations. How many small, neighborhood stores would be hurt if this ordinance becomes law?
- Ridiculous punishment: business violators will be subject to \$1,000 per day in civil fines and could face up to 6 months in jail and/or a criminal fine up to \$1,000.
- How much will it cost taxpayers and the local government to implement, monitor and audit the program, especially as it relates to a mandated per-bag charge?

Will Cost Manufacturing Jobs

- Southern California is home to plastic bag-manufacturing facilities that employ several hundred residents. This ordinance and others like it will put those well-paying jobs at risk.
- Government should be focused on putting people back to work, not closing down manufacturing plants and putting hundreds more people on the unemployment line.

Won't Support Recycling Programs

- California law requires all large grocery stores to provide a recycling bin for plastic bags and wraps. If this ordinance passes, stores won't have to provide the bins, meaning the possible dismantling of this important recycling infrastructure.

A Better Solution

- Bag litter can be reduced by encouraging consumers to use reusable bags and to recycle their plastic bags.
- These activities can be undertaken through partnerships between industry, retailers, local governments, recyclers and environmental organizations all without the burden of additional regulation, unintended environmental impacts, or negative economic impacts on consumers.