

How to Ban the Bag



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Action plan for the reduction and phasing out of single use plastics in a municipality

Summary

Plastic marine litter is one of the most serious threats faced by humanity, with predictions that plastic in the oceans will outnumber fish by 2050. It is a generational problem since many types of plastics take hundreds of years to degrade. The production of plastics uses a significant percentage of valuable fossil fuels, with plastic packaging accounting for over 40% of plastic use. Single-use plastic bags are a huge portion of packaging, with over 500 billion being used globally each year.

The uncontrolled dumping in countries with little or no garbage disposal is the main problem associated with their use, along with ineffective recycling and indiscriminate use in developed countries. When plastic bags enter aquatic ecosystems there can be devastating consequences such as killing sea birds and mammals when ingested, and breaking up into microplastics. When these enter food chains they are ingested by plankton and filter feeders, toxic chemicals are leached and this can kill sea life and cause human health problems.

Many cities and countries have taken some steps to reduce use- such as allowing only thick more re-usable plastic, levies, bio-degradable bags and outright bans. Some have been more successful than others.

A plastic bag ban can be enacted successfully following the DSPIR framework including: a public education and awareness campaign, media involvement, stakeholder engagement, and using a phased out- approach with viable options offered and in place. City legislatures must work with the public and stakeholders and not against them if the ban is to remain in place.

It may seem insignificant to ban plastic bags in a small city, but this is an important step in the reduction of all single use plastics, since news of a ban spreads through a country and the response will be favourable if the residents of the city supported the ban. As all of the stakeholders have been engaged, it should be much easier to enact a ban in a state and the country. If action around the world is not taken to stop any more plastic entering the ocean, then oceans are doomed and the consequences of this are dire.

Introduction: Why do we need to ban the bag?

Plastic is a valuable resource, and should not be thought of as a throw away convenience material. The manufacture of plastic uses fossil fuels (mostly oil and natural gas) , and its production accounts for approximately 5% of the world consumption of fossil fuels. This means it has a significant impact regarding the addition of carbon to the atmosphere and oceans. More fossil fuels are also used during the manufacturing process. In developed countries this waste of resources is an important issue.

Single-use plastic bags are one part of a larger group that includes items such as water bottles, straws, coffee cups, coffee pods, produce bags, detergent bottles, and many more. Packaging accounts for at least 40% of plastic use, with over 500 billion single-use bags being used every year, meaning that these types of bags have a working life of about 15 minutes. The main source of plastic bags entering the ocean is the uncontrolled dumping of plastic waste in developing countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, where there is little or no waste management.



Figure 1. Ocean plastic waste in Bali, Indonesia (source: www.cnn.com).

Plastic persists for decades in the ocean, where it fragments into microplastics that bioaccumulate in the food chains, and release toxins that can biomagnify up the food chains. Microplastics have been detected in organisms at every level in food chains. Toxins such as phthalates and BPA cause reproductive problems in humans as well as animals, and dioxins are carcinogenic. Plastics can also cause entanglement and ingestion, by marine animals and birds leading to immense suffering, death and plummeting of populations. Chris Wilcox, a research scientist with Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization predicts plastics ingestion is increasing in seabirds, that it will reach 99% of all species by 2050, and that effective waste management can reduce this threat. (Wilcox, Chris, Erik Van Sebille, and Britta Denise Hardesty, 2015)



Fig 2 This Laysan albatross chick died after sharp plastic pieces punctured its digestive tract.
Credit: Claire Fackler/NOAA

Many people believe that the long-term solution to unmitigated plastic waste is the

3 R. approach- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. As part of this program, single-use plastics should be replaced by more environmentally benign products. The 3R program will be a critical part of the healing process until other ways are found to remove plastics from ecosystems. However, the best possible solution should involve “Refuse” before the 3Rs are implemented, because it is highly likely that recycled plastics may again end up on beaches and in the oceans; behaviours have to change across the whole value chain.

Many countries collect plastic bags for recycling, but after collection it can be problematic where they actually end up: in the regular waste stream, and countries such as China where child labour is used to clean, sort and prepare the plastic for reuse, causing severe health and environmental problems. (Plastic China, 2017)



Fig 3. Family sorting through plastic waste, China. Jiu-Liang Wang Plastic China.
<https://www.plasticchina.org/>

In countries where there is no infrastructure for garbage collection plastics end up in rivers, and the ocean where extreme environmental effects are being seen. There are several options for reduction of single-use plastics: legislating to ban them altogether, instigating a levy, or voluntary reduction by manufacturers and retailers. The actual strategy that can be successful will depend on the country and or region due to social, economic and political variations, and it must be a part of an integrated waste management plan. France banned bags outright in 2016, after many retailers had

already stopped giving out plastic bags, or charged a levy. Despite 80% of the reusable bags in France being imported from China, several local business have started making bags, and this could lead to potentially several thousands jobs created.

Rwanda has banned plastic bags, and they have received international praise for doing so. Despite there being severe financial penalties for giving out bags, there is a thriving black market industry around smuggling bags from neighbouring countries. Many desperately poor people who collect bags for recycling are suffering, as this is their only source of income to feed their families. The Rwandan government did not take into account the poverty of people, and lack of education therefore no understanding of the problem. Informal waste picking can have economic benefits. In Jakarta it is estimated that waste-pickers divert up to 30% of plastic waste, extending the life of landfills with an estimated yearly benefit of \$50 million dollars (Medina, 2008). Supporting pickers can have social, economic and environmental benefits; for example in Brazil 60,000 pickers organised into 500 cooperatives, and earn twice the minimum wage. However, despite this the plastic waste entering rivers and oceans from such countries is staggering. Several other countries have taken steps to reduce the use of single use plastics; for example Italy and France.

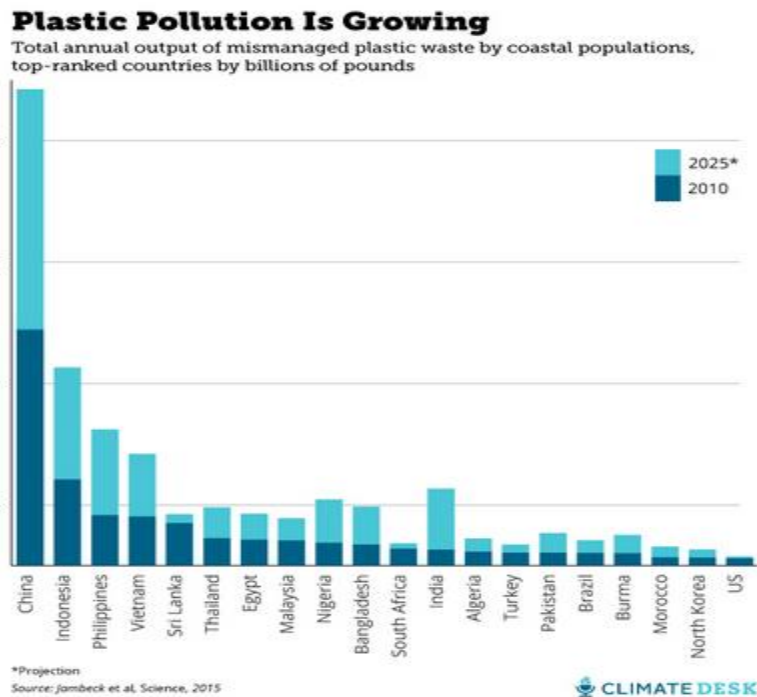


Fig 4 Scavenging ocean waste in Indonesia (source: www.theguardian.com).

Maybe in the future all plastics will be recycled and reused, but right now the plastic in the ocean is there to stay and we cannot add any more and sustain a living ocean.

Waste picking in developing countries, and recycling in developed countries is not reducing the amount of plastic in the ocean, which is going up every year. It is necessary to ban plastics where an alternative can be found, if the ocean has any chance of sustaining life as we know it. At the same time it is essential that developed countries help developing nations to put in place effective garbage collection, and processes to ensure that plastics do not enter rivers and oceans. Since this is the crux of the world problem, it is of little value for action to be taken only within a developed country or region. With this in mind, any local action must be part of a global movement.

Fig 5



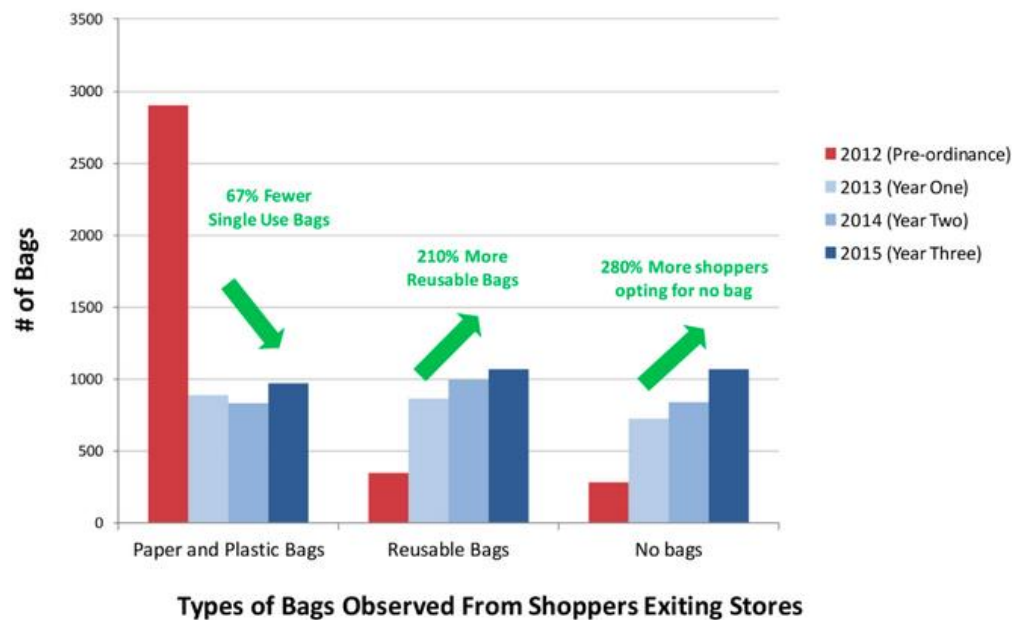
Surfrider campaign logo Fig 6



Ban the bag sticker. <https://vancouverisland.surfrider.org/ban-the-bag/>

Do plastic bag bans work, and are they really good for the environment?

We have to be quite sure what we mean by a ban on plastic bags. In California there is a state wide ban- or is it really a ban? Thin plastic checkout bags have been banned, but not the thicker plastic bags. There is a levy of 10 cents on these and also on paper bags. The rationale was that the thicker ones last longer, are more likely to be re-used, and they had to have some re-cycled content and specific requirements. Alameda County passed a law similar to the state law, and found an 80% reduction in the number of any kind of bag (shown in the fig, below).



The data was collected directly from stores, and from customers exiting stores.

Other counties found similar results, but all concluded that charging for bags had a significant impact on whether people brought their own bag or not. The plastic bag industry does not agree at all that plastic check out bags are a problem, and claim that a very small percentage of plastic in the waste stream in California is in fact thin plastic bags. This is certainly not the case in third world countries.

Many countries and cities around the world have levy's on plastic bags, have banned thin bags, or allow only biodegradable bags. Rwanda is the only country to have banned

any kind of plastic bag. Whatever method is adopted, the essentials of the Honolulu strategy can be used: Goal A being a reduction in the amount and impact of land-based litter and solid waste entering the marine environment. Implementing a successful strategy will involve a multi-pronged and holistic approach that involves working with, not against all stakeholders and various levels of government, and having a robust monitoring system in place. The following action plan details a phased approach to plastic bag reduction in a developed world city, and it can also be used for any or all single-use plastics.

The Problem

This can be organised using the DPSIR framework.

Drivers

- The creation of the “need” for plastics by the manufactures and marketers, after WWII. A whole packaging industry sprang up along with a sell- job on the public that everything needed to be double and triple packaged. Consumers blindly went along with the convenient, disposable “clean” approach to life that was sold to them.
- Supermarket style shopping has resulted in consumers being disconnected from the source of the goods they buy, so they just blindly throw things into their cart without a thought for the consequences of their choices.
- Some brilliant marketing person thought up the notion that all tap water was a health hazard and we shouldn’t drink it. Bottled water was born! (true that in many parts of the world the water will kill you, but in many others it won’t.)
- First world style shopping in third world countries that have no means of garbage disposal except chucking it in the ocean results in masses of garbage washing up on beaches around the world.
- Politicians in league with big business prevents government action, or causes environmental action to be blocked.

- Lack of environmental education worldwide has resulted in mass ignorance about the issues.

Pressures

- Consumption of fossil fuels to make plastics, or use of valuable farmland to produce crops such as sugarcane and corn used to make bio-plastics.
- Plastics industry releases millions of tons of carbon into the atmosphere (and oceans) resulting in accelerating climate change.
- Plastics release all kinds of toxins such as phthalates and these can enter ocean food chains
- Many plastics clog drains and this can lead to flooding- particularly significant in countries such as Bangladesh where monsoon rains already have environmental and human consequences
- Floating plastic rafts cause hazards to marine mammals.

State

- Plastic rafts the size of countries floating in the ocean
- Plastics even found in the Abyss
- Washed up plastic more than 5 feet deep on many beaches in the Pacific and Indian oceans
- Marine animals severely affected. Many dead whales found with tons of plastic in their stomachs. Many seabird populations have declined more than 90%.
- Micro-plastics in the food chains- recent film of plankton ingesting plastic fibres
- Human health impacts- plastics absorb and release toxins such as PCBs and phthalates. These are oestrogen mimics that can affect both human and animal reproduction. Many male fish found to be feminised.
- More plastic than fish soon

Impact

- Negative impact on fishing industries- disruption of food chains. Most of the world relies on fish for their primary protein source. Fish contaminated with microplastics from physical breakdown of larger plastics.
- Negative impact on human health. Already seeing reproductive problems in Pacific Islanders who are exposed to huge amounts of plastics.
- Many Pacific Islands and rim countries rely on tourism and several feet of plastic waste on the beach seriously impacts this.

Response

- Will have to be generational- the plastic that is here now will be with us for many generations to come
- Possible technologies such as plastic collecting machines (would need a heck of a lot of them)
- Start with local bans. (involving local citizens, students, NGOs such as Surfrider and politicians and go from there)
- Really need international action to make any impact at all.
- Developed countries must help developing countries to instigate garbage collection as this is where the majority of plastic litter comes from.
- Mass education about the issue- schools are the best place. Children have a huge influence on adults.
- To be successful, any legislation must have the buy-in of the stakeholders. Passing a ban right off the bat is highly unlikely to achieve this, so a phased approach that involves all stakeholders at every step will have a much greater chance of success.

Overview of the phased approach to ban the bag

Timeline: 8 month period

• **Phase 1 2 months**

- Community education, petition signing, businesses to sign on to becoming plastic free- stickers, ads on TV radio
- Interviews with local radio and TV stations, newspaper ads- the issue, impacts locally and globally etc.
- Visits to schools- presentations, form school action groups. Coordinate with NGOs such as Surfrider.
- School-wide beach clean-up awareness day.
- Business associations

Phase 2 2 months

- Presentations about the issues to all municipal councils in the area. - the issue and what you want, support from phase 1.
- Continue with community education.
- Form a working committee with the local council.

Phase 3 2 months

- Propose a phase-out approach to council. Work with them (go over all the issues and problems here)
- Details of the plan
- Hold screenings of Plastic Ocean and Bag it- invite public and stakeholders. Discussion panel after the films. Invite media.

Phase 4 2 months

- Stakeholder meetings- group discussions and individuals to “air” objections etc
- Showcase businesses that have gone plastic free on their own
- Offer solutions to objections



- Source re-useable bags - local, ethical, sustainable
- Set up a question/answer page on the council website.
- Council votes on a ban and /or levy

Ban the bag campaign

Phase 1: the start of the campaign

- The first step is to **form a diverse group** including as varied ages and backgrounds as possible.
- Name your group, design a logo and “motto”, set up a facebook page to document your journey for example: https://www.facebook.c/Fin-FreeUnited-Conservationists-Victoria-263367703732989/?ref=aymt_homepage_panel
- get business cards made, start an online petition- for example https://www.change.org/p/ask-victoria-city-council-to-ban-single-use-plastic-bagsand_print_paper_petitions.

- Get t shirts made, and bag-free stickers to show-case businesses that have gone bag free.
- **Assign roles** for group members for example: school contact (teacher would be best), media organiser, petition organiser, NGO coordinator, advertising/events person, council/politician contact person, business coordinator.

2. Identify the stakeholders

- Plastic bags are given out(checkout and other places such as produce) in all stores such as **grocery stores, pharmacies, hardware, takeouts**. These businesses are the primary stakeholders.
- **Consumers**- they want checkout bags, and often use them for garbage.
- **Plastic bag manufacturers**
- If the municipality is coastal, **tourist-based industries** such as cruise ships, wild-life watching, surfing, diving.
- **NGOs** such as Surfrider, Plastic Coalition
- **Legislative bodies**- municipal, state and federal levels
- **Children**- their future is at stake.

3. Engage with stakeholders.

This stage is vitally important as legislation is unlikely to be successful and remain in place, if stakeholders are not included, don't know the enormity of the problem or a cost-effective alternative is not suggested. It will be the most time-consuming and frustrating since most people are resistant to change.

- Meet with any **local chapters of NGOs** such as Surfrider to coordinate the campaign with them.
- The **first** and most important step is **public awareness** of the problem.

- The most effective way for the majority of people to be reached is through their children and the media. Have the young people of your group form into education groups (3 or 4 students is best). They prepare a presentation, **brochures and petition** about the environmental and health problems associated with single use plastics. Arrange for the groups to speak to as many **schools** as possible in a 4 week period. Each school can be left with information brochures and petitions- include what individuals can start doing such as: writing to councils, businesses, asking for re-useable bags. Ask schools to participate in a **region- wide same day beach cleanup**. Leave details with schools and ask them to sign up for the event.

Students (and the bag Monster) with the Victoria Ban the Bag campaign speaking to elementary school students



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- Give a **media release** about the beach clean-up day (include why the beach cleanup is being done). Get a **media interview** for the students so they can get their case out there.
- Ask **businesses** to host an **awareness event outside their store** (find business that don't use plastic bags) Set up a display table outside the store, petitions for signing (asking councils to implement a strategy for reducing single use plastics.) Hand out brochures, and leave posters with the businesses, and ask them to display the plastic bag free sticker.





Victoria Ban the Bag students connecting with local businesses and asking for support.

Ban the Bag Victoria students on a local radio station.

- Again get **media** to come to your event. Best to have children involved- the public are much more likely to listen to them. Contact local radio and TV stations and ask them to interview the students about their campaign.
- Contact **business associations** and get the student group to give their presentation to them and ask for their support. Students could suggest that a few businesses could go bag free and champion the cause. This happened in Victoria when Mountain Equipment Coop did just that, and it was very powerful to have them on the side of the campaign. They did an audit of a year of not using plastic bags, and found that they did not lose any business, and in fact made more money as they spent less on check-out bags. Mother nature's Market did the same, and are spearheading the campaign.
- Civic engagement- If there are **residents associations** in your area, give the presentation to them.

- Visit as **many businesses as possible** and ask for their support. Draft a **letter for them to sign** (an example is included in the appendix).



Ban the Bag Victoria students first success- Mother Nature's Market agrees to back their campaign.

(When approaching councils all of this support is essential to present to them, as their primary responsibility is to include all stakeholders in their final decisions.)

- Keep detailed records of the objections to a ban. These will have to be addressed as the campaign proceeds.
- Make a **youtube video of the students giving their presentation**. Send this to all local lawmakers.
- Approach **local council members** and try to get one or more to back your campaign.
- Since an **alternative to plastic bags** must be presented, this is the time to source ethical, sustainable and cost effective reusable bags. Also it may not be possible to eliminate checkout bags altogether initially, so source a sustainable paper alternative as an interim choice. Approach businesses that have done this already and ask for their help.

Phase 2: present your case to lawmakers.

Step 1

Students prepare a **presentation** for law makers informing them of why there should be a ban, and what the students have done to get support from the stakeholders.

This should include:

- The environmental and
- health effects of plastic bags
- Their contacts with local businesses
- School presentations
- Public events
- Media



Step 2

Book presentation times with all area councils. Students give their presentations and ask the councils for their support. Here are the Victoria Ban the Bag students giving their very first presentation to their local council. It is most important that you empower the students, even if they make mistakes. (much greater impact if it comes from the heart).

Step one

Prepare a plan for the council to use in order to implement a ban. The word “ban” usually initiates a defensive reaction on the part of lawmakers as they are afraid of voter push back. A phased out approach is more likely to succeed, as this gives stakeholders time to be involved, voice their objections, plan for the change to reusable bags, (There are objections to this approach- for example it does give serious objectors time to organise, but the benefits outweigh them)

Here is an example of a plan designed by Victoria students. It is an outline only, and the students went on to work with the council to refine and come up with a working action plan that is currently being implemented.

Plastic bag reduction the way forward: Victoria Student plan

Stage 1

*-Public education/outreach to stakeholders. Pamphlets in mailboxes/ businesses outlining the issue and proposed solutions (short term and long term).
Students could help in the writing of these.*

-Meetings with business association/ neighbourhood groups- possible pilot programs with willing businesses agreeing to not give out plastic bags for a period of time- monitor and report back on reactions.

-Media coverage- C-Fax already have agreed to follow the students in this campaign. CTV would also likely do the same. Shaw Channel 4?? Great if the students could be on TV with the mayor to speak about what they are doing.

*-Students around Saanich design a Saanich re-useable bag – contest run on the media. Source locally (are makers of organic cotton bags in Vancouver).
Bags could be distributed to stores to give out?*

-Levy on plastic checkout bags. Money collected pays for the Saanich bags and the public education campaign.

-Need some kind of monitoring of the possible reduction in use- 6 months?? Need to find out from the UK government how they did this as they claim a large % in reduction- not sure about this, however.

Stage 2

-Move to an increased fee, along with continued public education/outreach.

- *Sufficient notification of when plastic bags will no longer be given out. Thrifty foods gave several months notice, same with Mother Nature's on Cook St. Thrifty foods gave out re-useable bags for several months - then charged for them.*
- *Finally eliminate checkout bags altogether*

Step 2

Follow up meetings with councils to present "The way forward action plan"

This stage may take considerably longer than 2 months as it depends on the format and timing of council meetings. Also it may take more than one visit to council. Students will have the most impact, and if they are involved at this stage they must be empowered to do it on their own as this will come from the heart and have maximum impact and effect. During this time, hopefully councils will refine the action plan and work with the students. The following **key themes** should dominate all **stakeholder meetings**:

- **Wasteful Practices:** The wasteful practices due to single-use packaging and the need for more sustainable behaviour. This should be of the most importance for all stakeholders.
- **Education and Awareness:** The need to raise awareness by engaging with businesses and other stakeholders on the environmental and health effects of single use plastic retail bags .
- **Reusable Bags and Convenience:** Promoting the use of and benefits of reusable bags, as opposed to the convenience of single-use plastic bags. **Regulatory Authority:** Local governments' power and constraints to regulate. Pros and cons of all types of bags.

Phase 3 Lead up to regulatory action

If the Council agrees to move ahead then they should put together a **working action plan**. Here is an example of how that might look:

Communicating plans to the public

- via a City Website: Plastic Bag FAQs, summary of activity, progress, and important process/event information.

Education and Awareness Campaign:

Involve local students and other volunteer groups to develop and implement an education campaign throughout the community.

Have screenings of Plastic Oceans documentary- Council, public and stakeholders invited. Panel discussion after the film.

Stakeholder Workshops:

- Start with an informal gathering of all the stakeholders. This could happen along with a screening of “Bag it”. This gives an opportunity for all groups to meet in a non- confrontational setting.
- Next hold dedicated workshops for key stakeholder groups to engage with Council, staff and the public on their particular perspectives on this issue. Stakeholder groups include business leaders; advocacy groups, residents (including youth groups); and industry representatives.
- The City must support Stakeholder Events: provide communications support to any stakeholder-organized event on this subject.
- Business Pledges: Cooperate with and support key businesses who would like to participate in one or more of the following bag reduction program elements, or other strategies to reduce retail bag use:
- Voluntary reporting on bag use volumes;

Implementing increased signage / notices regarding retail bag usage;
Plastic bag take-back programs;
Voluntary bag-fee or 'bag-free' pledges; Reusable bag donation centre for clean, free bags for shoppers.

Reusable Bag Design Competition

It might be desirable to design and have made, re-usable bags that celebrate the city in question. These could be given to businesses to start off the transition away from plastic bags.

There could be a competition for schools to promote the design and production of the most sustainable and inspiring reusable bag for the City. Prize to be awarded by Mayor and Council on the evening of the final open-house. (positive media coverage)

All city beach clean up (this would only happen in coastal towns and cities, but public space clean ups could be substituted)

Schools, public, stakeholders and council members invited to beach clean-ups across the city.

Final Open House:

Final public engagement prior to any legislative decision related to plastic-bag regulatory action.

The City council holds an open house with displays, tables etc hosted by all the stakeholders. Public invited, media invited. Public input encouraged.

Council votes to ban single-use plastic bags.

Conclusion

A ban the bag campaign can be organized and implemented by using the DSPIR framework and the mandate of the Honolulu convention. To be successful in implementing such a ban on the use of single-use plastics, an intensive public awareness campaign must be initiated, the stakeholders identified and included in the discussions. Working with and not against them is key, and their objections must be investigated and viable alternatives presented if significant push back is to be avoided, and the ban to be unsuccessful. Involvement of local students is an important key to the success, as they have the greatest investment in the outcome. The proposed framework for implementing a ban can be adapted easily to any city, town, state or country. Such ban in itself will not solve the marine plastic problem, but should be seen as the start of a series of steps moving towards banning the use of any plastic where there is a more environmentally benign viable alternative. The format proposed can be used for many other plastics such as straws, coffee cups, Styrofoam, take-out containers, balloons etc. Once people have bought into the need to reduce the use of single use plastic bags, and they understand the consequences of such use, they will be much more willing to extend this reduction across the board to other products. With scientists predicting that by 2050 plastic will outnumber plastic in the ocean, it is essential that all municipalities take action now, and then extend help to developing countries to help them curb the horrific dumping of plastics into rivers and the ocean.

Appendix

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Sample letter to businesses

Rise Above Plastics

Eliminating Single Use Plastic Checkout Bags in Victoria

Letter of Support to Eliminate Single Use Plastic Checkout Bag in Victoria

Dear Mayor Lisa Helps and Victoria City Council,
As a retailer in Victoria, we strongly urge you to lead an initiative that will eliminate single-use plastic bags in Victoria. We support the use of alternatives such as reusable bags or recycled paper bags. However, we suggest placing a fee of \$.05 on recycled paper bags as an incentive for consumers to remember reusable bags or going without a bag for small purchases.

By eliminating plastic bags, you will help mitigate the detrimental effects they have on our community, waterways and marine life. Plastic checkout bags are typically made from non-renewable

resources such as petroleum or natural gas. They are commonly used once or twice for a short time before they become waste, and often litter. Plastic bags do not biodegrade in our lifetimes and can impact wildlife when littered.

In addition, plastic bags cost taxpayers for their collection and disposal; landfill management; and for their impact on municipal storm drains and other infrastructure. On Coastal Cleanup Day in 2012, over one million plastic bags were picked up off shorelines worldwide on one day. Plastic bags are constantly a top=ten item at beach cleanups.

A plastic bag free City of Victoria would help create a level playing field for businesses throughout the city and set a positive example for other municipalities and regions across British Columbia by minimizing unnecessary waste. For these reasons and more:

PLEASE SUPPORT THE ELIMINATION OF THE SINGLE USE PLASTIC CHECKOUT BAG IN VICTORIA

Sincerely,

Name: _____

Title: _____

Business: _____

X _____ Signature

Phone: _____ E=mail:

Visit our website: vancouverisland.surfrider.org Like us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/surfridervi