

## *Proposed plastic bag ban*

### *Background/supplementary information*

## **The City's own studies suggest reducing plastic bag use**

“The purpose of the consultation is to solicit feedback on options to **reduce the use and disposal of plastic bags in Toronto.**”

## **Academic research in Ontario has concluded that plastic bags must be banned**

A study team from Western University prepared a report for the Coastal Centre on 'Assessing and Mitigating Plastic Pollution in Lake Huron'. They propose that plastic bags be banned. Although they reported on Lake Huron they stress that their findings apply to all the Great Lakes. Below is one of their recommendations.

**“Recommendation:** As a short-term action, encourage the public to use reusable bags and reuse plastic bags. Also encourage retailers to charge customers for the purchase of plastic or reusable bags if not already doing so. As a long-term action, **municipalities need to create a by-law to legally ban one-time-use plastic shopping bags.**

**“Benefits:** This is a means to change people's daily habits by eliminating and reducing waste from single-use plastic bags. In terms of the ban, various towns and cities across the world have already enforced single-use shopping bag free zones. For example, the town of Leaf Rapids, Manitoba was the first municipality in North America to ban plastic bags in 2007. The municipal budget showed that this could be an opportunity to save money that the town of Leaf Rapids had been spending to clean up the community. Following the ban, the town is reportedly much cleaner and it is anticipated to be even cleaner than that as time progresses.

“Residents of the town are taking more pride in the community because they are doing something that is good for the environment.”

## **Hundreds of cities, towns, states and countries have banned plastic bags**

See [StopPlastics.ca](http://StopPlastics.ca) website for partial list

## **River, lake, and ocean life is choking on plastic**

Over 5 trillion plastic pieces weighing over 250,000 tons are floating in the oceans according to scientific studies.

Plankton, crucially important to life on the planet, is being overtaken by plastic. They are one of the most important organisms on this planet. Their ability to utilise the sun’s rays means they are fundamental in the earth’s global productivity and produce nearly 50% of the global oxygen as a by-product. Plankton form the base of the marine food web but they are being annihilated by plastic.

“Researchers from the Algalita Marine Research Foundation tracking marine debris in the North Pacific found that plastic flotsam was more abundant than zooplankton, the tiny (often microscopic), marine animals...”

In marine ecosystems, plastic bags land on coral and smother it.

It is estimated that an enormous number of marine animals are killed by plastic...

“Hundreds of thousands of sea turtles, whales, and other marine mammals, and more than 1 million seabirds die each year from ocean pollution and ingestion or entanglement in marine debris. Marine

debris is manmade waste that is directly or indirectly disposed of in oceans, rivers, and other waterways.”

"It affects wildlife in two ways: entanglement and ingestion," says Eriksen. For instance, according to Bettina Saier, director of the Oceans Program at World Wildlife Fund Canada, "140 species have been found entangled in marine plastics; some of them, such as leatherback turtle; are endangered; others, such as rare whales, have been “found drowned." Animals also frequently consume plastic, thinking it is food; "86 percent of turtles, 44 percent of marine birds, and 43 percent of marine mammals have plastic in their guts," says Saier. "In the case of filter feeders like whales," says Wilhelmson, "they open their mouths and consume plastic indirectly."

## **We must stop using fossil fuels to avert cataclysmic climate change**

Plastic bag production relies heavily on fossil fuels from production to disposal.

In Canada, plastic bags are mainly manufactured from ethane. Ethane is separated from natural gas and then, in a process called cracking, made into ethylene which is used to make products like plastic bags. This process uses a tremendous amount of energy.

The plastic industry insinuates that ethane is a by-product of natural gas and if it weren't used to manufacture plastic it would be wasted. This is not true—until we wean ourselves completely off fossil fuel, ethane can potentially be used in much more productive applications such as a fuel to power gas turbines\_ or as a green(er) transportation fuel : “Since the world does not need more plastics, abundant ethane, instead of methane, can be the greener fuel transportation opportunity”

## **Recycling only delays plastic disposal**

Recycling plastic invites manufacturers and packagers to produce more and more plastic. Instead of solving the problem, recycling makes the problem worse.

Most plastic is only reprocessed once before it goes to a landfill.

When referring to plastic “downcycling” is a more accurate term than “recycling”.

When we collect and remanufacture plastic, we are only delaying its disposal. The final destination for all plastic is either a landfill, where it doesn’t decompose, or an incinerator...”

Or it ends up in oceans, lakes and rivers where it destroys ecosystems and kills wildlife.

Only 7-15% of plastic bags make it to recyclers. Stewardship Ontario reported a 7.2% recovery rate for plastic film in 2013 while the City of Toronto said that 15.3% of plastic bags are recycled.

## **The cost of cleanup and recycling are passed on to taxpayers and residents**

The plastics industry manufactures plastic products but doesn’t take full responsibility for clean-up either monetarily or practically. Rather, they invite residents to recycle and to join in and pick up litter on park clean-up days.

The plastics industry only contributes a percentage of the costs associated with the disposal and recycling of plastic bags. Taxpayers are on the hook to cover most of the costs.