



September 21, 2011

The Honorable Paul Koretz
The Honorable Paul Krekorian
Members, Los Angeles City Council
200 N. Spring Street, Rooms 425 and 440
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Council File #11-1531 Plastic/Paper Retail Bag Prohibition – Oppose

Dear Councilmember's Koretz and Krekorian:

The American Chemistry Council (ACC), a national trade association of manufacturing companies - including domestic producers of fully recyclable plastic bags – is opposed to a proposed ordinance to ban both fully recyclable plastic bags as well as paper bags. In our view, enactment of such an ordinance would:

- Potentially put at risk several hundred manufacturing jobs in the region;
- Ironically result in the dismantling of a local plastics recycling infrastructure that has been steadily diverting more plastic bags and wraps material from disposal each year and;
- Require the city to spend scarce resources to implement these new requirements and ensure overall compliance.

LOCAL MANUFACTURING JOBS AT RISK

Southern California is home to several plastic bag manufacturing facilities, employing several hundred residents. Passage of this ordinance could put those jobs at risk, not to mention the hundreds of other jobs associated with suppliers and vendors. With the local unemployment rate near 13%, it is incomprehensible an ordinance that may put more local residents out of work is being considered.

PLASTIC BAG/FILM RECYCLING IS INCREASING

Allegations that plastic bag and film recycling is failing are false. At the request of the Los Angeles County Public Works (LACPW) Department, ACC recently commissioned a study by Moore Recycling Associates, Inc. to: **1)** quantify the pounds of plastic bags and film collected for recycling from material recovery facilities (MRFs) in the County from 2007 through 2009; **2)** delineate the percentage of plastic bags collected versus total film; and **3)** determine how much of the total film was from the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.

- The study reveals a 39 percent growth in the recycling of plastic bags and other film plastics (*see examples below*).
- The recycling of plastic bags alone grew 62 percent during this period suggesting that residents have become accustomed to putting their plastic bags into their curbside recycling bins.
- In the unincorporated areas of the county, curbside collection of plastic bags and film increased by 40 percent from 2007 to 2009.

In addition to local curbside collection programs, California law requires all large grocery stores and pharmacies to provide a recycling bin for plastic bags. These bins provide a statewide consumer infrastructure that can capture not only recyclable plastic grocery bags but newspaper, dry cleaning, toiletry, and other bags and film as well (e.g., product wraps for cases of soda, paper towels, etc.). Ironically, if plastic bags are banned, stores in the City of Los Angeles could simply opt out of providing and servicing the bins and thus eliminate a convenient consumer recycling infrastructure. This was the case after the City of San Francisco banned plastic bags. Passage of this ordinance would have the perverse effect of dismantling a local and convenient recycling infrastructure.



PLASTIC BAGS ARE NOT ALWAYS “SINGLE USE”

Surveys consistently show that most people “reuse” their plastic grocery bags for multiple purposes such as picking up pet waste, lining home trash cans or carrying damp clothes. A ban on this product will require consumers to purchase new plastic bags for these very same uses.

NEW BUREAUCRACY & CITY SPENDING REQUIRED, HIGHER COSTS FOR CONSUMERS

Under the proposed policy, city staff will be required to spend time and resources to oversee implementation of this program and ensure compliance. With on-going cost pressures and budget reductions to city services, it is arguably a questionable use of taxpayer money to create a “bag bureaucracy” when other, more cost-effective bag policy options are available. Such spending would likely increase further if this proposal is amended to impose a consumer tax on paper bags as city staff would be required to audit the collection of any “bag tax” to ensure retailer compliance. Should you consider imposing a minimum “bag tax” as well, bear in mind that such a proposal could ultimately increase grocery costs for consumers and disadvantage smaller markets. Large stores could use their buying power to negotiate a lower price for bags—and therefore offer a lower priced bag to their customers.

REDUCING BAG LITTER AND DISPOSAL THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Reducing bag litter and waste can be accomplished by limiting unnecessary bagging, enhancing and promoting recycling programs and encouraging consumers to use reusable bags. ACC and its members have consistently been willing to work toward this goal and, in fact, sponsored legislation (AB 1141 – C. Calderon) in 2009 that would have created an annual fund of nearly \$25 million [paid for by bag manufacturers] to support recycling and storm water pollution prevention programs statewide.

In our view, bag litter and disposal can be reduced with a policy encouraging consumers to use reusable bags and to recycle their plastic bags. These activities can be undertaken through partnerships between industry, retailers, the City, recyclers and environmental organizations all without the burden of additional regulation, unintended environmental impacts, job loss, or negative economic impacts on consumers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss potential recycling opportunities in the City of Los Angeles. If you or your staff has any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me at 916-448-2581 or via email at tim_shestek@americanchemistry.com.

Sincerely,



Tim Shestek
Senior Director, State Affairs

cc: Members, Los Angeles City Council; City Clerk

