

Is a Plastic Carry Out Bag Ban Justified?

Many communities all across California have either banned plastic carryout bags altogether or are somewhere in the process of doing so. Environmental extremists have pushed for a plastic carryout bag ban in community after community based primarily upon claims of environmental damage to marine wildlife and marine habitats.

Photos and videos on the internet are presented to support those claims.

But not all information presented on the internet is factual. Misperceptions, misunderstandings, and exaggerated claims about harm to the environment and marine wild life are widely available. For example, the video titled "[Are You Being Told the Truth About Plastic Bags?](#)" debunks the common misperceptions and exaggerated claims about environmental damage caused by plastic carry out bags.

The key issue is harm to marine wildlife and marine habitats and the ocean. It is said that 80% of all plastic bags and plastic debris in the ocean comes from land based sources and conveyed to the ocean via storm drains and rivers. The other 20% comes from marine sources, such as ships and windblown debris from beaches and even tsunamis.

Plastic carryout bags end up as roadside litter, bags enter the storm drains and flow out to the ocean along with other trash and plastic debris. Harm to marine environments and wildlife is the primary stated reason to ban plastic carryout bags.

What you are not told, is that there are ongoing projects that will eliminate trash including plastic bags and plastic debris from reaching the Ocean. The Federal Clean Water Act created a program called the Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) that requires local agencies over a period of 10 years to reduce trash and other pollutants that enter the ocean. The Trash TMDL projects will install trash screens on storm drain catch basins to capture trash including plastic bags and plastic debris. The trash screens are cleaned out on a regular schedule to prevent clogging of drains.

In other words, once hundreds of trash screens are installed in storm drain catch basins that empty in county rivers, trash conveyed to the ocean will be eliminated with the exception of windblown debris that enters the riverbed or ocean directly. This amount is strictly small potatoes in comparison to the quantity that previously came from storm drains. This means harm to marine wildlife and marine environment will be minimal and the problem becomes largely a roadside litter problem where plastic carryout bags are less than 1% of all roadside litter.

While the installation of trash excluders cannot undo damage done in previous years, the amount of trash that will now escape the storm drains and flow into rivers and the oceans and various coastal habitats will essentially be zero.

Proponents argue that a plastic carryout ban is more effective in removing all bags from both the terrestrial environment and marine environment than trash excluders on storm drains. However, since

not all plastic carryout bags are eliminated by the proposed ordinance, it means that a 100% solution is not required.

In other words, a plastic carryout bag ban is simply not justified.