

Shopping will cost more with Plastic Bag Ban

By Anthony van Leeuwen, 26 April 2013

Protecting the environment from plastic carryout bags is going to make your shopping a lot more expensive. If community leaders have their way, a plastic bag ban is in your future.

A plastic bag ban normally involves a ban on plastic carryout bags and a fee of 10 or 25-cents on paper bags. The fee is intended to coerce you to purchase and use reusable bags.

A box of 1000 plastic carry out bags or T-shirt bags can be purchased on Amazon.com for \$25 plus tax. So that is about 2.5-cents each. Obviously, large retail stores pay less than 2-cents each at bulk prices.

So for a typical family that uses about 20 plastic carryout bags per week it would cost retail stores less than \$21 per year. Of course, you the customer pay for those bags through higher prices.

If the family chooses to use paper bags, they will be available for purchase at 10-cents each. Since paper bags hold more, we can assume 15 paper bags per week. That means the family would pay \$84 per year for paper bags including tax. If the fee is 25-cents per bag that would be \$210 per year.

If the family chooses to use the cheaper reusable bags, the cost is about \$2 each. A two-car family will have at least 8 bags per car or 16 bags costing \$35 including tax. These bags must be hand washed and hung up to dry. Washing the bags in the sink usually involves letting the bags soak in a solution of soap and bleach to kill bacteria. The process is a nuisance and could take as much as three hours a month. Over the course of one year, you are looking at 36 hours of your time. Using a wage rate of \$12.00 per hour, half of California's average labor rate, that labor is valued at \$432.00. While your out-of-pocket cost is only about \$35, adding the value of your labor brings the total cost to \$467 per year.

If the family chooses to use more durable reusable bags that are machine washable and dryer safe the cost will be approximately \$6.00 each. The family will pay \$103 for 16 bags including tax. In addition, the cost of machine washing and drying your reusable bags once per month will add as much as \$18 per year to utility bills. Labor, to put the bags in the washing machine and dryer and folding the bags and putting them in your car, is estimated to be about 16 hours per year and valued at \$192.00. Your out-of-pocket costs are \$121, adding the value of your labor brings the total cost to \$313 per year.

On the other hand, if you value your time as worth \$12 per hour, it actually becomes less expensive to use the cheaper reusable bags, toss them in the trash and replace them with new bags every other month or so. Your out-of-pocket costs will be less than \$210 per year, and you benefit by saving time.

Of course, to really save money, stress, and time you can do what many others do and simply purchase your own box of plastic carryout bags, keep them in your car and then bring some with you when shop. Or you could skip bags altogether and carry your purchases out of the store stacked in your arms.

No matter which solution you choose to carry your purchases home, it will cost you. And you will be yearning for those good old days when merchants offered a free bag for shopping in their store.