

Don't Be Fooled By a Sly and Slick Bag Banner

BAG BANNERS ARE SLY AND SLICK LIKE A USED CAR SALESMAN WHO PLAYS "FAST AND LOOSE" WITH THE FACTS

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Arguments to support plastic carryout bag bans are weak, generalized, emotional, and irrational. These arguments can be better described as nothing more than lies, myths, half-truths, distortions, and embellishments. It doesn't take a lot of time for a person with an open mind and some skills in sorting fact from fiction to examine the arguments and come to the conclusion that a ban on plastic grocery bags is unsound. But it takes a commitment to objective truth to sort fact from fiction.

Develop a Skeptical Show Me Attitude

So how do you immunize yourself from the misinformation that bag ban proponents attempt to foist on you and keep yourself from being hoodwinked and having the wool pulled over your eyes? You have heard the saying "I'm from Missouri, show me!" This little saying describes the kind of skeptical attitude that you should develop, that you do not take things on faith, that you cannot be easily fooled or conned, you have to see the evidence and the proof. (Yahoo, 2013) Developing a skeptical "show me" attitude, learning to ask pointed questions, will make you less susceptible to misinformation and false propaganda. (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz, & Cook, 2012)

Familiarize Yourself with the Lies, Myths, Half-Truths, and Exaggerations

Start by reading and familiarizing yourself with the contents of the article titled "The Lies, Myths, Half-Truths, and Exaggerations of Bag Ban Proponents" (van Leeuwen & Williams, The Lies, Myths, Half-Truths, and Exaggerations of Ban Ban Proponents, 2013). This article will provide you with a basic understanding of many of the myths and misinformation typically used by most bag banners.

Learn To Recognize Spin

The next step is to learn to recognize the spin. You do that by learning to ask questions as you encounter different claims. Bag ban proponents play "fast and loose" with the facts, like con men where winning the argument is more important than honesty, truthfulness, and integrity. To prevent from being taken in, you must arm yourself with a skeptical attitude and learn to ask pointed questions. Through simple techniques you can take the offensive and put the sly and slick bag banners on the defensive.

General Techniques to Arm Yourself

Consider the following items when confronted with the claims of bag ban proponents:

Beware Of Generalized Claims

Virtually all of the arguments you hear from bag ban proponents are general in nature. They apply to plastic in general, trash in general, or bags in general. This is a very clever and sly trick that is used repeatedly in their arguments, because your brain assumes they are talking about the specific topic at hand and you often will not catch the nuance of what they are saying! For example:

- They quote numbers of “bags” used by people, but rarely specific numbers for “plastic grocery bags”.
- They claim the existence of a “great Pacific garbage patch” in the ocean with a high density of smaller plastic particles, yet no evidence that any of those particles are plastic grocery bags.
- They claim grave concern over plastic bags on the beaches, or pieces of plastic bags in the waterways, or plastic bags that jam recycling equipment. Yet very few claims (if any) provide specific references to only the grocery-style plastic bags targeted by the bans. Also, they never provide any alternative solution other than banning plastic grocery bags.
- One of the most repeated statistics used at city council meetings are the number of plastic grocery bags used in California. Yet the city council has no jurisdiction over California! They aren't deciding on bags for California, or for the United States, or the entire world, but only for their citizens!
- They project an image of plastic bags filling the creeks, catching on trees, and blowing around their city, yet when asked to take you out and show you exactly where this is a problem in their city they cannot do it!

Here is an example: You hear the statement that 0.6% of litter is plastic bags. The question to ask is does the 0.6% of litter represent plastic grocery bags or other bags or both? If the answer is both, then ask what percentage is plastic grocery or plastic merchandise bags? And, what would be the effect of banning the entire population from getting that particular product? And would there be any other side effects, for example increased litter in paper bags or reusable bags?

Ask Logical Questions First

When a problem is presented, the normal thing to do is to ask logical questions. For example:

- If plastic grocery bags are in the creeks, then ask how did they get there and who put them there?
- If plastic grocery bags are on the side of the road, wouldn't it be reasonable to investigate how they got there? Did they get there from garbage trucks or motorists or pedestrians who litter?
- If plastic particles are found in the ocean, then ask for their composition and how they got there.
- If plastic newspaper bags that come into the home are not a litter problem, how is it that plastic grocery bags that come into the home are a litter problem?

All logic seems to go out the window with bag bans, and generalized hand waiving about various issues immediately point to the illogical conclusion that only one particular type of plastic bag must be banned from perfectly normal law abiding citizens. How is a person who receives a plastic bag at a store, reuses it as a trash can liner, then properly disposes of it in their garbage can be responsible for plastic bags in the creek or on the side of the road?

Ask Yourself “What Are They Not Telling Me?”

An important question to ask yourself is “What are they not telling me?” For example:

- Bag Ban Proponents love to tell you that the recycling rate for plastic bags is only 5% implying that plastic bags should be banned. What they don’t tell you is that 76% to 92% of consumers reuse plastic bags. And that 40.3% of consumers use the plastic carryout bags to line waste baskets, as trash bags, and to pick up pet litter. (Edwards & Fry, 2011) (APCO Insight, 2007) Furthermore, since most reusable bags are made from Polypropylene (PP) or Cotton which are not recyclable or compostable because of a lack of recycling and composting infrastructure. Less than 5% of reusable bags are made from High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) or Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) and are recyclable through the In-Store Recycling bin. Therefore the recycling rate for reusable bags is close to 0%, a fact you will not hear from Bag Ban Proponents. (van Leeuwen, Plastic Bag Recycling Rate - A Non-Issue, 2013)
- Bag Ban Proponents love to tell you that plastic bags and other litter comes out the storm drain system and flows into creeks and rivers on its way to the ocean. What they don’t tell you is that under the Federal Clean Water Act officials are required to eliminate trash coming out of the storm drains through installation of trash capture devices. The name of the local program that installs these devices is called Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) program. These devices trap trash which is then removed and properly disposed of on a regular basis by the local jurisdiction.
- Bag Ban Proponents love to tell you the story about catastrophic floods in Bangladesh that inundated as much as 75% of the country and was blamed on plastic bags. What they don’t tell you is that normally 18% of the country floods each year, bringing rich silt on farmlands. Also, that less than 50% of the country has waste collection and disposal and that trash is normally disposed of in makeshift dumps and drainage ditches. While plastic bags and other modern packaging materials may have contributed to flooding by clogging sewers and drainage channels, plastic bags were definitely not the lone culprit. (van Leeuwen, Plastic Bag Bans and Third World Countries, 2013)

Evaluate Statistics And Evidence

Bag ban supporters often like to throw out numbers that sound large and impressive and are supposed to be shocking. But evaluate the numbers, particularly in relation to the bigger picture. For example:

- **Californians use 20 billion plastic bags per year!** This number is big and makes it sound like we must do something! But you need to ask “Where did this number come from?” “How was this number derived?” (van Leeuwen, Do Californians Really Use 20 Billion Plastic Bags?, 2013) Billions of bags sounds like a lot, but how many billion other articles are consumed daily? How many tons of garbage are collected every day? And for all of these numbers, what percentage of the general issue is the particular bag that is targeted by this ban? And this statistic actually backfires on them, if you use a logical approach. Ask this question: Of the billions of bags used, how many are documented to have ended up in the creek, and what percentage of overall bags does this represent? 1 bag in 50,000? 1 bag in 100,000? So 100,000 people are blamed and banned from getting bags because one lousy bad guy threw his bag in the gutter instead of the garbage can? (And what does that say about the local newspapers who throw hundreds of

thousands of plastic bags wrapped around their newspapers down in the driveways every day it rains?)

- ***Plastic bags are a commonly littered item and account for 14.6% percent of wildlife entanglements.*** This sounds like thousands and thousands of animals are entangled in plastic grocery bags. According to the Ocean Conservancy 2010 Report a total of 336 wildlife animals were found entangled in Marine Debris worldwide in 2010. (Ocean Conservancy, 2010) Out of 336 **only 49 or 14.6% worldwide** were entangled by plastic bags including 6 amphibians, 19 birds, 11 fish, 6 invertebrates, 6 mammals, and 1 reptile. The largest cause of entanglement was fishing line with 126 or 37.5% and fishing nets with 82 or 24.4%. The 49 entanglements out of 336 should be kept in perspective with the half-million birds including protected species that are killed every year by “green energy” wind turbines. (U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2002) While environmental groups are concerned and very vocal about sea turtles eating a plastic bag mistaken for a jellyfish there is not even a whisper to ban wind turbines that kill hundreds of thousands of birds by blade strikes every year!
- ***San Jose experienced an 89% reduction in plastic bag trash.*** What they did not tell you that the 89% reduction in plastic bags was in storm drains, and that the reduction only consisted of 71 plastic grocery bags in 23 storm drain traps! (Romanov, 2012) The City of San Jose has a “storm water collection system that includes more than 1,150 miles of storm sewer pipelines, 29,900 storm drain inlets, 1,500 storm outfalls, and over 4,500 miles of curb and gutter”. (City of San Jose, 2012) When you consider that the claim of an 89% reduction in plastic bags is based upon the results from only 23 storm drain catch basins as being representative of the entire San Jose storm drain system is simply NOT creditable. (Williams & van Leeuwen, 2013). Furthermore, those storm drains actually did their job and captured litter, including those plastic bags!

Ask The Specific Questions!

Learn to ask specific questions. For example:

- “How will a plastic grocery bag ban solve the litter problem?”
- “Are there better ways to solve the plastic bag litter problem?”
- “Why are plastic grocery bags singled out?”

These kind of questions force the bag ban supporter to justify the illogical conclusion to ban bags. In virtually every case, they are overlooking much larger problems and narrowly focusing in on a single limited type of plastic bag without a valid reason. They will state "it is just the beginning" which is even a more shocking revelation than anything else!

For Example:

The bag ban proponent will talk about plastic carryout bag litter. But as you can see, plastic carryout bags are only a small part of plastic litter and very small part of litter compared to fast food waste.

- Plastic Carryout bags are less than 0.6% of all litter.
- Plastic is 19.1% of roadside litter.

- Fast Food Waste is 29.1% of roadside litter.

Demand results and measurements

For every bag ban proposed, demands should be made to specifically do the following:

- Determine the exact problem caused by plastic grocery bags.
- Determine how the impact of a plastic grocery bag ban will be measured and tracked.
- Determine a “minimum improvement” required to justify an ongoing plastic bag ban.

Conclusion

Bag Ban Proponents are frequently well intentioned people who sincerely want to clean up litter and prevent harm to wildlife and the environment. However, being sincere is not enough. To solve problems you must have a mind that trained to think through complex issues. You must be able to put issues in proper perspective and see past the political spin and understand the underlying issues. You must be able to ask questions to clarify complex issues and devise real solutions that are broad based and at the same time defend and protect the Constitution and preserve the freedoms and liberties of all Americans.

Remember, Bag Ban Proponents are driven by political correctness and an emotional response to a perceived problem. Truthfulness, honesty, and an accurate assessment of facts are not important to them and are thrown out the window in their drive to ban plastic carryout bags. They are best exposed by shining the light of truth onto their claims.

About the Authors

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