

RETAIL CHECKOUT BAG SURVEYS

On September 2, 2008, the Town of Westport, Connecticut passed an ordinance to ban the use of plastic bags for retail sales and to promote the use of reusable shopping bags. Following an extensive education campaign, the ordinance became operative on March 19, 2009.

Two separate surveys were conducted approximately one year later to measure the impact of the ordinance on the use of retail checkout bags and to compare the results to practices in other nearby communities.

The first survey was taken at noon on Monday, May 8, 2010, at Stop & Shop food stores in Westport, Norwalk and Wilton, Connecticut. Three different survey teams measured the number of plastic, paper and reusable bags used by each shopper. It also was noted whether shoppers chose to carry out items without the use of any bag. The surveys were taken from a total of 313 shoppers as they left each store.

The second and more extensive survey was taken during several different days and at various hours in June 2010 at three different food stores in Westport and one in Norwalk, Connecticut. The same methodology was followed to note the type and number of retail checkout bags used by each of 915 shoppers.

The survey teams for the first survey included David Brown, Sydney Brown, Stephanie Rohland, Liz Milwe and Jonathan Wormser. The survey teams for the second survey were composed of members of the Green Village Initiative organization of Westport.

The results of the first survey showed that of the total bags/non-bags used by shoppers at the Westport Stop & Shop, 53% were reusable, 45% were paper and 2% were for items carried out by shoppers with out any bag. By comparison, at both the Norwalk and Wilton Stop & Shop stores, only 10% of the bags used were reusable and 86% were plastic. The remaining options for those stores were either paper or no bag at all. Chart 1 displays the Percentage Retail Bag Use in May 2010 for each of the three Stop & Shop stores.

In June 2010, 468 shoppers were surveyed during seven separate time periods at the Westport Stop & Shop store. The results were similar to those of the previous month, with 50% of the bags being reusable, 48% being paper and 2% for items where no bag was used. Whole Foods and Trader Joe's stores in Westport showed lesser use of reusable bags. 32% of the bags used by Whole Foods shoppers were reusable and 29% of the bags used by Trader Joe's

shoppers were reusable. At the Norwalk Stop & Shop, there was a slightly increased use of reusable bags from 10% in May to the 15% level in June 2010. Chart 2 displays the Percentage Retail Checkout Bag Use in June 2010 for the three stores in Westport and the Stop & Shop store in Norwalk.

The Westport Stop & Shop has extensively promoted the use of reusable retail checkout bags with store signs and has prominently offered its own reusable bags for sale at a very low price. This undoubtedly is a factor in the higher use of reusable bags at its store compared to the two other Westport stores.

The results of the two surveys show that the Westport ordinance has significantly altered shopper habits regarding the use of retail checkout bags. The Westport education campaign coupled with the active promotion of reusable bags by Stop & Shop has resulted in 50% or more of the retail checkout bags being of the reusable type.

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