



# DO PLASTIC BAG LAWS WORK?

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

### CALIFORNIA



Statewide ban on thin plastic bags (under 2.25 mils) & min 10-cent fee for paper & reusable

Law was adopted by the legislature and later approved by statewide voter referendum

151 local jurisdictions had adopted bag laws prior to upholding statewide law

A similar local law in San Jose, CA: reusable bag use increased from 4% to 62%, plastic bag litter decreased 59% on streets and 89% in storm drains

In Alameda, CA: local efforts to curb plastic bag litter and plastic foodware diverted litter by 80%.

60%+ reduction in single-use carryout bag consumption in first year

Corresponding reduction in plastic bag litter in D.C.'s Anacostia River

83% of D.C. residents and 90% of D.C. businesses support the law or are neutral



### CHICAGO



Initially adopted a straight ban on all thin plastic bags (under 2.25 mils) but large chains, including Walmart, simply switched to giving away thicker plastic bags that qualify as reusable bags

In reaction, environmental groups and some retailers united to push for a 7-cent tax on all carryout bags

In the first month after the tax, the number of plastic and paper bags Chicagoans consumed at grocery stores dropped 42%

## WHY REGULATE PLASTIC BAGS?

### WINDBLOWN LITTER



Even if disposed of properly, plastic bags get caught in the wind

Visible in environment as litter (often caught in trees)

Litter clean-up costs taxpayers

### MARINE IMPACTS

Plastic bags can entangle or choke marine life

Break down into small pieces

Sea turtles mistake for jellyfish



### WASTE MANAGEMENT



There is no viable market for dirty plastic bags

Clog recycling machinery

Contaminate other recyclables

## RECYCLING PLASTIC BAGS IS NOT THE ANSWER



Recycling is a commodities market: some materials are more valuable than others & dirty plastic bags don't have a viable market.

Plastic bag recycling rates are difficult to measure, estimated at ~5%.

Plastic bags often clog municipal recycling machinery when recycled curbside.

Instead of take-back recycling programs at retailers, focus should be on customers bringing their own bags (BYOBag).

Bag reduction laws (bans & fees) encourage BYOBag behavior.

### WASTE MANAGEMENT HIERARCHY

