

## Bag taxes achieve little

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What do taxes on plastic bags accomplish? Not much, at least according to the Tax Foundation, a non-profit think tank based in Washington.

According to the group, supporters exaggerate the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, landfill deposits and litter that bag taxes will accomplish. On top of that, the revenue that bag taxes generate for states and municipalities has been disappointing.

“Also, bag taxes cause unintended effects, such as stimulating bulk purchases of plastic bags, perhaps of a type that would cause equal environmental damage. And bag taxes invariably get caught up in the political process in which special interests in business and government are served more than the public’s interest,” the group said in a report released May 12.

“Whether assessed theoretically or practically, bag taxes are not a promising development in tax policy.”

Nevertheless, don’t expect to see the bag-tax trend go away. While mainstream environmental groups are spending more time on global warming, there are too many grass-roots groups calling for bans and taxes on plastic bags than you can count — and new efforts seemingly pop up every week.

## An eloquent defense

Richard Stein, a professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, penned an eloquent defense of plastics that was published May 11 by The Valley Advocate in Northampton, Mass.

Stein wrote the letter in response to an article the newspaper had published on the advantages of living “plastic-free.”

The newspaper titled Stein’s response “Plastics not all bad.” Drawing from his experience and long career in the plastics industry (Stein was a 1994 inductee into the Plastics Hall of Fame), he tackles some of the repercussions of living “plastics-free.”

“Modern electronics are possible because of the use of plastics in constructing circuit cards. While this has given rise to some problems, would we be willing to give up television or Internet?”

“When I was young, milk bottles were made from glass, but such bottles have mostly disappeared because of the advantages provided by plastics in weight savings (leading to less fuel for washing and delivery) and less harm resulting from cuts occurring with breakage (which caused a serious injury to our milkman). Also, it takes much energy to make and recycle glass.

“I have a letter from the former director of Bell Labs commenting on the great economic savings and environmental gain in replacing lead-sheathed phone cables with plastic ones. I recently had a colonoscopy and I am thankful that it was possible to use a flexible plastic catheter for this rather than a rigid glass tube.”

Stein said that while there is “rightful concern about health damage arising from trace material leaching out of plastic used for food containers and bottles,” he added that “plastics have their place and can help our lives, but they must be used properly.”

It’s rare to see such a thorough, balanced and thoughtful response to a news column on plastics.

*Loepp is managing editor of Plastics News and author of “The Plastics Blog.”*

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