

# Do Bag Bans Work?

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Opponents of bag bans say that reusable bags and recycling efforts are more effective in reducing waste and litter.

The jury is still out.

San Francisco made history when it became the first city to officially ban plastic shopping bags in 2007, making it a pioneer of the outlawing of common to-go plastic products. Other cities in the Bay Area, including Oakland and Palo Alto, shortly followed suit.

However, the bans continue to cause controversy, as their effectiveness in reducing litter and waste are being evaluated.

According to the [New York Times](#), cities are reconsidering the bans, partly because of lawsuits filed by those who oppose them, “but also because too many shoppers in San Francisco and Palo Alto simply shifted their carry-out purchases to paper sacks, which have environmental costs of their own.”

This transition is a subject of debate for both supporters and opponents of the bans.

“There has been a shift back to paper bags, which is double the greenhouse gas emissions, and dramatically increases waste by about 80 percent,” says Keith Christman, managing director of plastics markets for the American Chemistry Council (ACC), who opposes bag bans.

“One of the reasons people talk about bans is to reduce litter, but this didn’t do anything to reduce litter. And it really didn’t do anything to address this.”

The issue is highly divisive, with the Oakland ban already overturned because it was found that the city failed to consider evidence of the plastic bag ban’s potentially significant adverse effects.

Bob Lilienfeld, editor of the [Use Less Stuff Report](#) (ULS), says that he had reached similar conclusions in his own research that bag bans are ineffective, and told Earth911 that “the issue isn’t paper versus plastic, but rather an overabundance of any bags.”

Lilienfeld looks to bring “personal responsibility” back into the discussion. “If people only took the bags they needed, and reused and recycled those rather than throwing them away or on the ground, the issue would take care of itself,” he said.

