

OpEd Contributors

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)



Laws targeting plastic don't achieve intended goal

By: Katy Grimes
October 5, 2009

Extra-liberal Seattle's rejection of a plastic bag tax should give pause to the coercive utopians who have initiated bag tax proposals around the country.

In Washington, D.C., in spite of a poorly written measure, the City Council recently passed a 5-cent tax per plastic bag.

Voters in the very blue city of Seattle, who voted for President Barack Obama by more than 80 percent, recently demonstrated intellectual honesty when they voted to shoot down a bag tax that had been previously passed by the City Council.

Estimated to cost each consumer an additional \$300 per year, the bag tax would have imposed a significant financial burden at a time when many residents in Seattle, and in cities across the country, are already struggling to make ends meet.

Voters realized it was unnecessary and would not provide any benefit to Seattle. Why? Nine out of 10 residents already recycle and reuse disposable bags. Studies show that the bag tax — much like San Francisco's plastic bag ban — would have no visible impact on litter, which was not a problem to begin with in the already environmentally conscious Seattle.

Additionally, grocery stores, food banks and convenience stores would have had to pay the bag tax, but large stores like Target, Sears, Fred Meyer and Macy's were exempt.

One would think that policymakers and legislators might have figured out by now that consumers will decide on which kind of shopping bag to use, if any, for their purchases. Instead, bag tax pushers from coast to coast want the government to decide what, how and when shopping bags can be used.

When sturdy, reusable plastic shopping bags entered the picture supposedly to conserve paper and plastic, environmentally conscious shoppers thought they would be the answer.

They are only now realizing that their low-carbon-footprint bag is also filled with nasty bacteria if not washed regularly. A recent microbiological study found that unacceptably high levels of bacterial yeast, mold and fecal bacteria reside in reusable bags.

The study found that 64 percent of reusable bags tested were contaminated with some level of bacteria and close to 30 percent had elevated bacterial counts higher than what's considered safe for drinking water. Further, 40 percent of the bags had yeast or mold and some had an unacceptable presence of fecal intestinal bacteria when

there should have been none.

Adding irony to insult, San Francisco's ban on plastic bags has not provided the environmental results The City expected. Anticipated environmental gains resulting from the ban were "nonexistent at best" and it likely did more harm than good. Consumers just switched from single plastic to double paper bags, few consumers remembered reusable totes — which caused delays at checkout lines — and recycling bins were hard to find or nonexistent.

And, plastic bags are not made from imported oil. They are made from ethane, which is a waste product extracted from domestically produced natural gas. If the ethane is not used to make plastic, it would need to be burned off — which would produce greenhouse gases. Plastic bags are an excellent use of a waste product.

Katy Grimes is a political analyst and columnist based in Northern California.

Find this article at:

http://www.sfexaminer.com/opinion/columns/oped_contributors/Laws-targeting-plastic-dont-achieve-intended-goal-63509302.html

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.