

Plastic bags – article

There is no free bag! At least not at grocery, drug and convenience stores. Why? Because there is a California law enacted in 2016 that makes an effort to encourage people to bring their own bags, and discourage them from taking a new reusable one every time they shop by charging at least 10 cents a bag. Why? Because the plastic tsunami is huge in our nation, and world. Primarily, it gives off Methane, a potent greenhouse gas that affects the atmosphere and our climate. The average customer goes to the store at least once a week and takes an average of 2 bags at a cost of \$0.10 to \$0.25 per trip, which is between \$10.40 and \$26 (a conservative estimate) that could be saved in a year. And it saves the environment even more!

Yes, every bag taken at the store costs the customer 10-25 cents each – Should the stores be asked to put up a sign to state how much they are charging? It takes our taxpayer money to clean up the mess they make when thrown away. And, yes, they are reusable, but only if the holder brings them back to the stores to reuse – or uses them in other ways. Data shows most folks do not. But the point is – say no to using plastic at all! Take a truly reusable, preferably fabric bag. Look at NextDoor for Morgan Ranch to see a list of great ideas. No, WM cannot take plastic bags for a number of reasons. We hope they are working on this big piece of our waste. Data shows that in 2018, plastics generation was 35.7 million tons in the USA alone, which was 12.2% of overall solid waste.

There are lots of pictures of turtles with their heads encircled with a plastic beer holder (good news, some producers are now offering a type of holder that will not do that). And pictures of people in countries in south Asia up to their knees in scrap plastic sent from other countries – all contaminated and toxic. Research now is showing that as plastic degrades –it never goes away – not only does it give off toxic emissions, but it breaks down into small particles called microplastics (and even nanoplastics).

Microplastics are being found in human blood – and in fetuses. This is now a serious threat! Plastics contain toxic substances. We must reduce our usage of this material that gives off hazardous methane emissions in every stage of its life cycle from oil extraction to the facilities that make the plastic pellets from the oil all the way to degradation in the landfills.

It is such a significant concern worldwide that the UN is working to do an International Plastics Treaty to restrict the plastic and keep it from going to these poor countries that have no facilities to reprocess it. It has become a huge issue. Ghana is burning it, especially e-waste, which is even worse for health of people and atmosphere. In the USA, there are two bills in Congress that you can write to your representatives to support – Break Free from Plastic (just reintroduced) and Protecting Communities from Plastics (to stop plastics companies from building 300 or more new facilities that give off toxins and harm health).

For those with a big backlog of bags, please take them to a store that collects them and gets them reprocessed into recycled content items. Rotary has been doing a terrific bag collection for a couple years – look for their boxes at Helling Library, Nevada City city hall, Briarpatch, and SaveMart, plus a few more. They send it to Trex to make their decking. Safeway stores collect it too with bins in front. Recycling the plastic is only the beginning. It needs to be reprocessed into new items to satisfy a circular economy.

Each of us can help this situation a lot by saying NO to plastic, especially plastic bags. Say NO – BYO – and REUSE – a LOT! Find a distinctive, fun fabric bag to use!

Shirley Freriks is a Grass Valley resident passionate about going plastic free. She is on the WasteNOT team that works in our community to bring awareness to the reasons why it is good for US and the Earth to reduce our plastic consumption, and how to do that. Offer your ideas at wastenot.plastic@gmail.com;

<https://wastenotplastic.wixsite.com/wastenotplastic> <https://www.nclimateactionnow.org/about-3>

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