

Thin Film Plastic Shopping Bags: Do we *really* need them?

• They are expensive

Retailers spend an estimated \$4 billion on plastic bags annually and pass this cost on to consumers. Though inexpensive to manufacture, they are costly to recycle and to retrieve from the landscape. Discarded bags also clog recycling machinery, costing time and money.

• They are resistant to decay

Littered bags can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade, and are persistent in the landscape and in our oceans. When the bags finally break into smaller and smaller pieces, they contaminate soil and water.

• They are seldom recycled

The average life span of a plastic shopping bag is 12 minutes from use to disposal. Plastic bags cannot be recycled in standard curbside recycling streams. Although some grocers take back these bags, less than 15% are recycled compared to a 50% recycling rate for paper bags. This means that out of the estimated 12,000,000 plastic bags used in Amherst annually, over 10 million are thrown away or littered.

• They are bad for the environment and bad for our health

Greenhouse gases and carcinogenic toxins are released in the production of plastic bags and the incineration disposed bags. Flyaway bags create eyesores, clog storm drains and waterways, and kill millions of land and sea animals from entanglement and ingestion annually. In addition, over 3,300 children in the U.S. die each year from asphyxiation by plastic bags.

• They consume fossil fuels

The equivalent of 12 million gallons of oil is required to produce the 100 billion bags that are used in this country every year, and fossil fuels are burned to ship them from China and other faraway countries. Amherst Town Meeting voted to divest from fossil fuel companies in 2013, and the passage of a plastic bag ban is another step that can be taken to decrease our dependence on this nonrenewable resource.

It is reprehensible and irresponsible to burden future generations and taxpayers with the impact of our wasteful habits, as reusable bags are readily available to consumers. Sixteen municipalities in Massachusetts as well as the states of California and Hawaii have already passed plastic bag bans. Adding Amherst to the list will build the momentum for additional communities to pass these bylaws and may push representatives to adopt a statewide ban.

**Please support Article 36 to end the use of
thin-film plastic shopping bags by Amherst retailers.**

Endorsed by: Atkins Farms, League of Women Voters, Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Recycling & Refuse Management Committee, Conservation Commission, Board of Health, Unitarian Green Sanctuary Committee, The Sierra Club, and Sustainability Coordinator Stephanie Cicarello