

StopPlastics.ca's responses to The Canadian Plastics Industry Association assertions about Plastic Bags as submitted by Hruska & Associates to Toronto City Council June 1, 2012 for the June 6/7, 2012 Council Meeting

In each of the boxes in this document the Canadian Plastics Industry Association asserts that the argument in left is a myth and the box on the right contains their counter arguments.

These are the statements that the industry claims are myths and which StopPlastics state are false:

- Plastic shopping bags are an environmental problem
- The bag-fee by-law has diverted millions of bags from landfill
- Plastic bags are a landfill problem
- Plastic bags are a litter problem
- Plastic bags are not reused
- Plastic bags are not recycled
- The five cent bags are not produced in Canada but China
- The bag fee has changed consumer behaviour and if I vote to rescind people will stop using reusable bags

Plastic shopping bags are an environmental problem

<p><u>MYTH: Plastic shopping bags are an environmental problem.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOT TRUE. Bags are not environmental problem in the City of Toronto. • Toronto has built a state-of-the-art reuse and recycling system for plastic shopping bags. • 82% of the bags distributed in the City of Toronto are reused or recycled and never end up in landfill. • This means very few bags end up in landfill. • (Data Sources: Stewardship Ontario Carry out Bag Study 2005)
--	---

StopPlastics' response:

Plastic waste is referred to as the biggest contaminant on Earth.

- It cannot biodegrade so it never goes away. Every piece of plastic ever made still exists. It only breaks up into smaller and smaller bits.
- It kills wildlife and destroys ecosystems. It is ingested by animals and eventually humans.

Since Toronto is situated on one of the Great Lakes, Lake Ontario, we have to consider the effect that plastic is having on the lake. Recent studies report that the problem is acute, concentrations of plastic were found to be greater in the Great Lakes than in any other body of water on Earth.

(Froklage, R. & Lant, C. (2013). Assessing and Mitigating Plastic Pollution in Lake Huron, prepared for The Lake Huron Centre for Coastal Conservation. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/o3AY7A> (PDF)

An article in Now Magazine, also reporting on Great Lakes plastic, names plastic bags as one of the culprits:

“So much of what enters the lakes-plastic bags, balloons, cigarette butts, excess packaging, drink bottles, coffee stir sticks - is used for mere seconds or minutes but remains in the environment for hundreds of years.”

StopPlastics.ca's responses to The Canadian Plastics Industry Association assertions about Plastic Bags

Mifflin, A. (2015, April 22). Lake Ontario's Plastic Soup: Just like the infamous garbage patches of the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean, our own backyard has turned into a toxic bomb. Now Magazine. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/RyDChJ>

The plastic industry argues that 82% of plastic bags are recycled or reused and therefore very few end up in landfill.

First let's deal with the reuse issue. The plastics industry says that in the event of a ban people will buy the heavier plastic bags to be used as kitchen waste collectors (see *below MYTH: The bag fee by-law has diverted...*) but the truth is that when plastic bags are used for kitchen waste they are too soiled to be recycled. "SWM staff confirmed that plastic bags that are removed from the front end of The Green Bin process are too contaminated and it is unlikely they can be recycled" <http://goo.gl/V1YpGE>

The plastic bag industry also likes to point out that plastic bags are recycled in Toronto, however the more accurate term to use is "downcycled".

"Even when it pays, recycling is a sham; for most non-metals, it's all downcycling to a lower quality material in a lower quality product; bottles into lawnchairs and plastic lumber, glass into roadbeds".

Alter, L. (2015, July 1). Recycling is broken, and now it's costing us all serious coin. Treehugger.com. Retrieved from: <http://goo.gl/LS5fpT>

Where does all that plastic ultimately end up? In the ocean? incinerated? landfill?

And it doesn't pay.

It costs more to recycle a plastic bag than it costs to produce a new one

San Francisco's Department of Waste recently calculated it paid \$4,000 a tonne to recycle plastic bags. Its resale price for the recycled product? \$32.

Nobody wants it. There's no value. It doesn't make sense," says Joseph Gho, CEO of EPI Environmental Products Inc., a Vancouver manufacturer of biodegradable plastics."

The recycling conundrum: How your blue bin hurts the environment Kevin Libin, National Post · Dec. 4, 2009 <http://goo.gl/0FP0BO>

StopPlastics.ca's responses to The Canadian Plastics Industry Association assertions about Plastic Bags

In a City of Toronto report “Pros and Cons of Options to Reduce Plastic Bags” the SWM staff

“Estimated that a ban could result in approximately \$200,000.00 in annual cost savings for the City of Toronto <http://goo.gl/wp87ay>

The bag-fee by-law has diverted millions of bags from landfill

<p><u>MYTH: The bag fee by-law has diverted millions of bags from landfill.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is more plastic, not less going to landfill. • While the number of bags has been reduced, the amount of plastic being consumed or purchased by residents has increased +17%. • Why? Because residents use plastic bags for their garbage. Residents have had to purchase heavier kitchen catchers as a substitute and kitchen catchers contain 85% more plastic. • (Data Sources: Stewardship Ontario Carry Out Bag Study 2005 & Ireland 21% Increase in Plastic Consumption Her Majesty's Customs Service)
--	--

StopPlastics' Response:

The plastic industry argues that bag fees caused even more bags to go to landfill because people had to buy the thicker “kitchen catchers”. StopPlastics.ca thinks Torontonians should be employing the perfectly acceptable practice of emptying their kitchen waste directly into the green bin or composting it. If residents feel the bins must be lined, discarded newspapers or cellulose lined kraft paper bags could be used. We transitioned from using plastic bags to kraft bags for yard waste, we can do the same for kitchen waste.

Plastic bags are a landfill problem

MYTH: Plastic bags are a landfill problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOT TRUE. BAGS HAVE NEVER BEEN A LANDFILL PROBLEM – before or after the fee. Bags are less than 0.8% of landfill. • (Source: City of Toronto Waste Data &
	Stewardship Ontario 2006 Carry Out Bag Audit)

StopPlastics' Response:

Plastic bags make up roughly 1 percent of the volume of waste in landfill. That's a lot of plastic bags when the massive size of landfills is taken into account, especially since it isn't biodegradable.

<http://goo.gl/tgWVPu>

In 2005 457.6 million plastic bags were used in Toronto annually. That amounts to 2,745.6 tonnes a year or 6,900 cubic meters of landfill capacity annually.

Blackwell, R. (2012, June 7). The battle of the bag. Globe and Mail. Retrieved from: <http://goo.gl/7B92Gk>

Plastic bags are a litter problem

MYTH: Plastic bags are a litter problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOT TRUE. Plastic bags represent only 13/100's of 1% of Toronto litter • (Source: Toronto 2006 Litter Study)
---	--

StopPlastics' response:

Plastic bags are in a unique category in regards to litter. Plastic litter escaping into an aquatic ecosystem, will have devastating consequences because plastic does not biodegrade. It breaks into increasingly small pieces, wreaking havoc on ecosystems.

Because plastic bags are incredibly light they migrate easily, often gathering in storm sewers and eventually getting into waterways. Since Toronto is situated on Lake

StopPlastics.ca's responses to The Canadian Plastics Industry Association assertions about Plastic Bags

Ontario we should acknowledge that plastic bags entering the Great Lakes and other waterways may be used for only a few minutes but remain in the environment for hundreds of years.

Sheri Mason, Associate Professor of Chemistry at SUNY-Fredonia and coordinator of its Environmental Sciences program studied the plastic problem in the Great Lakes. In a study conducted in the summer of 2012, in collaboration with the 5 Gyres Institute, she found that the plastic problem in the Great Lakes meets and exceeds litter accumulation levels in two ocean gyres. The leading culprits come from “shoreline and recreational” uses, everything from plastic bags and bottles to six-pack rings, toys and shotgun shells. The primary ways in which plastic harms wildlife within aquatic ecosystems is by entanglement and ingestion along with the destruction and smothering of the ecosystem floor, and accumulation of toxins associated with plastics.

Plastic bags are not reused

<p><u>MYTH: Plastic bags are not reused.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOT TRUE. 70% of the bags distributed in Toronto are reused for the green bin and other used. • (Source: City of Toronto Waste Data & Stewardship Ontario 2006 Carry Out Bag Audit)
---	---

StopPlastics' Response:

What happens to the other 30% and even if 70% are reused, it eventually becomes waste.

As noted above, plastic bags used as kitchen catchers and to pick up pet waste are too soiled to be recycled.

Plastic bags are not recycled

<p><u>MYTH: Plastic bags are not recycled.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOT TRUE. The bag recycling rate in Toronto is 40%. • (Source: Provincial Bag Study 2010) • Plastic bags are recycled in the blue bin and sent to EFS in Elmira to be recycled and then remanufactured into water pipes, outdoor furniture, and plastic wood. • The Toronto Western Beaches Boardwalk is made from 32 million plastic bags recycled in the City of Toronto! Made from plastic wood, it requires almost no upkeep, is pest resistant, and will last more than 50 years.
---	---

StopPlastics' response:

Most sources say that plastic can only be recycled once. Even if, with new technology, it can be recycled two or three times, what happens to it then? Plastic doesn't biodegrade into a substance the earth can digest which suggests that it will eventually become contaminating waste.

Recycling plastic bags does not necessarily reduce wastes as "it just manages the plastic bags that have already been created.

Recycled plastics still make its way back to the consumers' buy-use-dispose loop, thus adding more plastics in the environment. What we need to do is to avoid its usage in the first place."

<http://goo.gl/mDdXVh>

Furthermore, most plastic doesn't make it to the recyclers. Stewardship Ontario reported a 7.2% recovery rate for plastic film in 2013.

The five cent bags are not produced in Canada but China

<p><u>MYTH: The five cent bags are not produced in Canada, But China.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOT TRUE: 90% of the bags are made right here in Ontario employing 11,000 Ontarians; 5,000 in Toronto. • (Source: Provincial Government, Legislative Library)
--	---

StopPlastics' response:

Everyone is concerned about potential job losses. Councillor David Shiner addressed this issue in a Globe and Mail interview:

“There’s been talk about potential job losses in plants where these bags are being manufactured. ...You’re smirking!

I’m smirking. No one sits there and sews a plastic bag. They don’t cut them by hand. The plastic bag is made by an automated machine that spits them out so fast you can’t even count them, puts them together in a bundle and tosses them into a box. The labour we have is to either load the plastic in the machine or take the box away on a truck. Do that with a paper bag. Do that with a reusable bag.”

(Globe and Mail June 7, 2012 In his day, they used paper bags)

The bag fee has changed consumer behaviour and if I vote to rescind people will stop using reusable bags

<p><u>MYTH: The bag fee has changed consumer behaviour and if I vote to rescind, people will stop using reusable bags.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NOT TRUE. The bag has done its job. It has converted a majority of residents.• Those who have converted will stay converted. Those who have not converted after 3 years, never will.
---	--

StopPlastics' response:

According to a City report

“Single- family audits conducted by Solid Waste Management Services, after the 5-cent charge was rescinded effective July 1, 2012, suggest that the use of plastic shopping carryout bags have increased by 26%.”

<http://goo.gl/D5WW0g>