



Plastic Bags Aren't Banned Until They're Really Banned

by Kerstin Kalchmayr, Pollution Prevention Policy Volunteer  August 19, 2014

Next month, the Alameda County Waste Management Authority – Stopwaste – will assess the effectiveness of the county's plastic bag ban and consider whether or not to expand it to all types of stores. **Save The Bay is encouraging Stopwaste to close the gaps in their current policy and ban plastic bags at all retailers, just as Richmond, El Cerrito, Walnut Creek, and [many other Bay Area cities](#) have done.**



Photo credit: Dave Bleasdale

Since going into effect on January 1, 2013, Alameda County's [Reusable Bag Ordinance](#) has banned the use of plastic bags at check-out and instead encourages shoppers to bring their own reusable bag or purchase paper bags for a minimum of 10 cents. **But, the ordinance only applies to stores that sell food – grocery stores, large pharmacies, convenience stores – which means that over 5,000 of the county's 7,000 retailers are still handing out plastic bags.**

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Alameda County, like many municipalities around the Bay Area, understands the environmental and fiscal benefits that single-use plastic bag bans can bring. Plastic bags are one of the most ubiquitous litter items found in our urban and natural areas and pose a deadly threat to wildlife that become entangled in or mistakenly ingest them.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board requires 76 Bay Area cities to eliminate trash from their storm drains and creeks by 2022. Bag bans are one of the ways that cities can tackle their trash problem, reducing trash at the source and saving tax-payer money spent on extensive litter clean-ups.

We reviewed four years of trash cleanup data from all over the county and found that **although the ban went into effect at the beginning of 2013, plastic bag litter was still present at more than half of the county's trash "hot spot" sites throughout the year.** While the number of bags littered may be decreasing, getting to zero trash will require stronger policies.

Alameda County has come a long way on their journey to tackle plastic bag litter – it's time to finish the job. [Please join us](#) in urging the Stopwaste Board to implement a comprehensive bag ban that covers all retail stores and restaurants, and protect the Bay and its watershed from plastic pollution.