

A Possible Solution to Decrease Excessive Single Use Bag Waste

Introduction

For this project, I looked into whether or not consumers should pay for plastic or paper bags used when purchasing goods. Its been estimated that approximately 500 billion plastic bags are used each year around the world, with most of these bags being tossed out after only a single use which creates a lot of waste (Spokas, 2007). It is estimated that most plastic bags will last 1000 years with out decomposition assistance from the sun and other microorganisms (Stevens, 2001; UNEP, 2005). I was on a trip in California where I encountered my first grocery store that required the consumer to pay for each plastic bag they used. We used a lot less bags than we normally would have because we didn't want to pay the extra fee. I thought this was a great idea to reduce excessive plastic/paper bag usage and wondered how other people may feel about this requirement being introduced to local stores. I looked into how other states/companies have introduced this policy, if they've seen any change in plastic/paper bag usage and/or waste. The incentive of this requirement would be to reduce plastic/paper bag usage and decrease waste.

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Results



Conclusions

I found that most of my participants use plastic or paper bags when grocery shopping. I was happily surprised to see that the majority of the participants reused their bags after emptying out their groceries. Many participants believe they would switch to reusable bags if a fee was introduced for plastic/paper bag usage. A large percentage believe that requiring payment for each plastic or paper bag used when purchasing goods would decrease their overall usage. This has shown to be the result in California as well. After implementing a ten cent per plastic bag policy, Alameda County in California reported finding 433 plastic bags during city clean-up efforts as compared to 4,357 bags in 2010 before the plastic bag ban was in place, showing this may be a solution to creating less plastic bag waste (MNEBT 2017).

References

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