

Dear Alaska Legislators:

As the lead for the Sitka volunteer group, Bags for Change, we want to testify in support of HB 81. We believe that a disposable shopping bag ban benefits and protects Alaskans and our environment. We are in full support of this bill. In fact, we are so much in support that we are, at this moment, gathering signatures for a disposable plastic shopping bag ban ballot initiative in Sitka! We have 20 sponsors plus numerous other volunteers working towards a bag ban in Sitka.

There is growing concern about the effects of plastic and plastic bags on human health and on the environment upon which we depend. And there is a local and global concern about the number of disposable bags being used and thrown away.

Plastic bags are harmful to human health and are of particular concern in Sitka, where they can easily end up in the ocean. Plastic fragments in the ocean such as those from plastic bags absorb pollutants like PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyl) and PAHs (Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons), which are known to be hormone-disrupting chemicals. When marine organisms consume plastics in our oceans, these chemicals can make their way through the ocean's food web and then into humans who eat fish and other marine organisms

(<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2013/12/12/250438904/how-plastic-in-the-ocean-is-contaminating-your-seafood>). Nearly all commercially available plastics tested contained compounds that release estrogen-mimicking chemicals that have adverse human health effects at low doses especially in small children and fetuses, effects include reducing sperm count, cancers, infertility, feminizing boys, and masculinizing girls (Yang et al. 2011 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3222987/>).

Plastic bags are also affecting our environment. Plastic bags are made from petroleum, which contributes to climate change. The U.S alone uses 12 million barrels of oil every year to meet the demand for plastic bags. Plastic bags are particularly harmful to marine life. Plastic bags and their associated plastic pieces are often mistaken for food by animals, birds, and marine life like fish and sea turtles. The consumed plastic then congests the digestive tracts of these animals, and can lead to health issues such as infections and even death by suffocation.

The Bags for Change group is working to educate the community of Sitka about these health and other concerns and has been gathering data and input from the community. While some individuals are concerned about a ban or a fee, we are hearing overwhelming support for action to reduce the number of disposable plastic bags given away in Sitka.

In 2018, we did a random survey of 252 Sitka adults walking into our 3 local grocery stores. We asked, in Sitka, what should be done with disposable plastic bags. The question and results are as follows:

In Sitka, should single-use disposable plastic bags be:

A) Banned = 48 (19%)

B) Provided, but for a fee that would be used to support Sitka Schools and to reduce residents electric costs, = 129 (51.2%)

C) Handed out for free, = 42 (16.7%)

D) No opinion = 33 (13.1%)

A similar poll on a very conservative facebook page showed results of **195 = No Action; 225 = Take action on bags** (132 = Ban; 93 = Fee).

Bags for Change knows that citizens and visitors will have to adjust and learn a more sustainable behavior. But the change is not arduous or costly to make. And in the end, it benefits us all and provides people with a new model for the future adding new sustainable and resilient behaviors and habits.

Thank you for taking our testimony. We encourage you to move House Bill 81 forward and vote for it when it comes up. If you have any questions for us, please feel free to call me at 907-747-2708.

Sincerely,
Michelle Putz
Bags for Change
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