

Banning Plastic Bags Op-Ed

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A World Wrapped in Plastic: why the single-use bag should be banned

Inside the provincial New Brunswick Museum's marine life gallery hangs a one-thousand-five-hundred-pound leatherback sea turtle. This gorgeous animal tragically died long before it should have, after it mistook a plastic bag for a jellyfish floating on the ocean's surface. What's worse is that this heart-wrenching story is not unique to the turtle, as its species has become endangered due to plastic bag accidents like this one that occur every day.

As one of Canada's growing environmental concerns, the everyday use of plastic shopping bags has become an issue for the country. According to a Canadian Library of Parliament report written by Sam N.K. Banks, it is estimated that five hundred billion to one trillion plastic bags are consumed every year globally, and Canada alone is responsible for nearly three billion of them. This means that Canadians are taking home approximately fifty-five million plastic bags a week, many of which are disposed of and come to have devastating effects on ecosystems, habitats and wildlife. In addition to being a contributor to pollution, these bags are a visual nuisance and take away from our cities' natural beauty. Despite being convenient for groceries, shopping items and other consumer products, oxo-degradable plastic bags are doing far more harm than good.

Imposing a ban of plastic bags in the city of Halifax, and further, the entire province of Nova Scotia would be beneficial for citizens and our planet as a whole. With the support of the Atlantic Canada World Wildlife Fund, eliminating these single-use products will help our community to protect the environment, while also keeping the city clean and beautiful.

Due to being lightweight, plastic bags can be carried long distances by water and wind, getting caught in trees and fences, as well as finding their way to rivers, lakes, and eventually our

oceans. This poses a consequential threat to all wildlife, as animals often mistake plastic objects for food and suffer the same fate as the leatherback sea turtle displayed in the New Brunswick Museum. A study on the Beached Northern Fulmar bird at the University of British Columbia found that ninety-three percent of them had a stomach full of plastic. However, the damage does not stop there – once these animals die and decompose, the plastic remains and is freed back into the environment to continue harming other animals.

In addition to wildlife, plastic bags are also harmful to human health. As stated by environmental organization Greentumble, when they find their way into the ocean, the material can absorb dangerous hormone-disrupting chemicals, which have been known to stimulate illnesses like breast cancer cells. These chemicals are absorbed by marine life, which we then consume when eating fish and other aquatic animals.

Organizations like The Canadian Plastics Industry Association argue that most shopping bags are reused and recycled, and that other measures to reduce the number of plastic bags have already been successful; therefore, a plastic shopping bag ban is not necessary. However, The Worldwatch Institute points out that only about five percent of consumer plastic bags are actually recycled globally. The other ninety-five percent of the single-use bags either end up in terrestrial or marine ecosystems as mentioned above, or in landfills – both of which are problematic, as it takes up to a thousand years for one to decompose.

With the information provided, including other cities in Canada and countries like the United States, France, China, Bangladesh, Italy, Kenya, and South Africa all participating in the globally growing plastic bag ban, there is more than enough evidence for us to stand in global solidarity on this crucial issue. It is saddening to see the consequences of our consumeristic actions impacting the world around us. By banning single-use plastic shopping bags and

switching to the superior alternative of material bags, we will be improving the health of the Earth, and all those inhabiting it, together.