Matt Seaholm
Executive Director, American Progressive Bag Alliance
What is APBA?

The American Progressive Bag Alliance represents U.S. manufacturers, recyclers, and resin suppliers of plastic bags, who employ 25,000 men and women across the country.

- Sustainability
- Education
- Advocacy
APBA Recycling & Sustainability Initiatives

Plastic bags are 100 percent recyclable and highly reused.

Over 1 billion lbs. of plastic bags and film collected for recycling annually.

More than 30,000 retail recycling stations across the U.S.

90% of Americans have access to plastic retail bag recycling.

Recycled plastic bags make new, sustainable products.

Invested tens of millions on recycling capabilities and recycling and re-use education.
Important to Note: Re-Use

- Our biggest challenge in reaching higher recycling percentages is the level of re-use that plastic bags get.

- Studies have shown that 75-90% of consumers re-use their bags. Many times as a trash can liner or similar function.

- But we remain committed to growing recycling as an option for consumers.
Recycling Education in Action

APBA is currently running an educational competition for students at 23 Pasco County, Florida schools.
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Contest concludes on America Recycles Day, Nov. 15.

Participating schools will receive a birdhouse made from recycled plastic bags. The two schools that collect the most plastic for recycling will receive a bench made from recycled plastic bags donated by Trex.
Sustainability is at the heart of what we do.
Plastic Bag Laws
Retail Bag Ordinances - 2012
Retail Bag Ordinances - 2014

Passed in 2007
Passed in 2008
Passed in 2009
Passed in 2010
Passed in 2011
Passed in 2012
Passed in 2013
Passed in 2014
Passed in 2007
Passed in 2008
Passed in 2009
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Passed in 2012
Passed in 2013
Passed in 2014
Passed in 2015
Passed in 2016
Passed in 2017

Retail Bag Ordinances - Today
The Allure of Product Bans & Taxes
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Communities consider bag bans and taxes under the assumption they will:
- Reduce litter and landfill waste
- Reduce marine debris
- Reduce resource consumption and GHG emissions
- Create waste management cost savings

Most of these proposed laws are well-intentioned.
You can ban or tax a product and you will make it go away or have less of it.

But, it’s important to know that it comes with a cost…
And may not achieve the stated goals.
The Allure of Product Bans & Taxes

- Communities consider bag bans and taxes under the assumption they will:
  - Reduce litter and landfill waste
  - Reduce marine debris
  - Reduce resource consumption and GHG emissions
  - Create waste management cost savings

- BUT…bag ordinances don’t lead to meaningful improvements in any of these categories.
The Allure of Product Bans & Taxes

- If it’s solely about eliminating the product, regardless of the environmental and economic consequences of switching to alternatives, then the policy “works”.

- But if you want to reduce overall litter, waste, marine debris or provide other municipal benefits, bag bans and taxes do not work.

- Let’s take a look at a few numbers…
Understanding the Impact of Plastic Retail Bags

According to regional studies and EPA data, plastic retail bags make up:

- 0.6-2% of litter
- and 0.5% of waste.
For Example: Austin, TX

- Litter study done before Austin imposed their ban showed plastic retail bags made up a tiny fraction of overall litter.
Do Product Bans and Taxes Work?

When plastic bags disappear from waste and litter streams, the larger streams don’t change. Replacement products fill the gap and can lead to more litter and waste.

- Thicker plastic bags (California, Austin and Chicago)
- Paper bags
- Imported NWPP reusable bags
- Cotton/canvas bags

In a side-by-side comparison with each of these products, plastic retail bags consume fewer resources and have the smallest environmental impact over their lifecycles.
The Real Cost of Product Bans & Taxes

Bag bans and taxes impose real costs on families and businesses:

- Punitive taxes/fees hit lower-income families hardest.
- These laws create bureaucratic red tape for local business owners and drive administrative costs for local governments.
- These laws drive business away, encouraging consumers to shop where there aren’t bans and taxes—a particular issue for shops located near the edge of enforcement zones.
- Bans threaten U.S. manufacturing and recycling jobs.
Full Circle: San Francisco

- San Francisco, the first locality in the U.S. to enact a plastic bag ban, now accepts plastic bags in their curbside recycling – one of the first places to do so.

- Innovation in recycling and collection methods creates real environmental and economic benefit. Bans and taxes have just not shown to do that.
What Experts Say

“...this problem is solved not by bans on products but by proper disposal, recycling and education.”
- Timothy Wright, Retired Captain, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

“Concluding that a bag [ordinance] will make a substantial dent in waste going to landfills is misguided.”
- Chief of Sustainability, Denver, Colorado

“Let’s not fall into the trap of competing with our surrounding cities by racing to a ban on retail plastics bags... It is less important that we appear green, let’s be green.”
- Zero Waste Working Group, St. Louis Park’s Environment and Sustainability Commission
“There are really good things about plastic bags—they produce less greenhouse gas, they use less water and they use far fewer chemicals compared to paper or cotton... If the most important environmental impact you wanted to alleviate was global warming, then you would go with plastic.”

- Dr. David Tyler, University of Oregon
Sustainability is at the heart of what we do. And we welcome opportunities to partner on recycling efforts.
Thank you!

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