

Are plastic bag bans the environmentally friendly thing to do?



Filling up our landfills?

- Per EPA, plastic bags make up only a small portion of 0.3% of municipal solid waste.

Advancing Sustainable Materials Management: 2015 Tables and Figures

Assessing Trends in Material Generation, Recycling, Composting, Combustion with Energy Recovery and Landfilling in the United States

July 2018

Total Paper & Board Pkg	10.0%	11.7%	11.4%	13.7%	10.4%	13.0%	13.0%
Plastics Packaging							
PET Bottles and Jars			0.2%	0.2%	0.7%	1.0%	1.1%
HDPE Natural Bottles			0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%
Other Containers	0.1%	0.8%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%	0.7%
Bags and Sacks			0.3%	0.5%	0.7%	0.6%	0.3%
Wraps			0.6%	0.7%	1.0%	1.1%	1.5%
<i>Subtotal Bags, Sacks, and Wraps</i>			0.8%	1.2%	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%
Other Plastics Packaging	0.1%	1.0%	0.5%	1.0%	1.2%	1.3%	1.8%
Total Plastics Packaging	0.1%	1.7%	2.2%	3.3%	4.6%	4.9%	5.4%

Are they really “everywhere?”

- Statewide litter surveys show that plastic bags typically make up >1% of litter.

2018 New Jersey Litter Survey

A Survey of Litter along
94 Roadways

Conducted for

**New Jersey
Clean Communities Council, Inc.**



Appendix A - Litter by Item, Material and Percent

Litter Category	Percent
Vehicle - Rubber	11.0%
Other Paper - Paper	8.9%
Shrink Wrap - Plastic	4.9%
Sweet Snack Packaging - Plastic	4.7%
Water Bottles - Plastic	3.8%
Unbranded Towels/Napkins - Paper	3.0%
Packs, Matches, Lighters - Composite	3.0%
Corrugated Boxes - Paper	2.9%
Block Construction Foam - Foam	2.7%
Cups - Plastic	2.2%
Other Plastics - Hard - Plastic	2.1%
Cup Lids - Plastic	2.1%
Straws/Wrappers - Plastic	2.1%
Glass - Other	1.9%
Vehicle - Composite	1.8%
Unbranded Retail Bags - Plastic	1.7%
Soda Bottles - Plastic	1.7%
Beer Cans - Metal	1.6%
Cups - Paper	1.6%
Cups - Foam	1.6%
Vehicle Debris - Plastic	1.6%
Salty Snack Packaging - Plastic	1.5%
Foil Food Wrappers - Metal	1.4%
Sports Drink Bottles - Plastic	1.4%
Wine/Liquor Bottles - Plastic	1.4%
Clothing - Cloth	1.4%
Construction Materials - Metal	1.3%
Newspaper - Paper	1.2%
Tissues - Paper	1.2%
Soda Cans - Metal	0.9%
Ads/Signs/Cards - Paper	0.9%
Peanut Foam - Foam	0.9%
Beer Bottles - Glass	0.8%
Drinking Caps/Seals - Plastic	0.8%
Branded Retail Bags - Plastic	0.8%
Construction - Plastic	0.8%
Home Articles	0.8%
Broken Bottles - Glass	0.7%
Utensils - Plastic	0.7%

But what about marine debris?

- Plastic retail bags typically make up ~1% of beach cleanup material.
- Up to 95% of plastic in the ocean comes from 10 river systems in Asia and Africa.



Top 10 Polluters

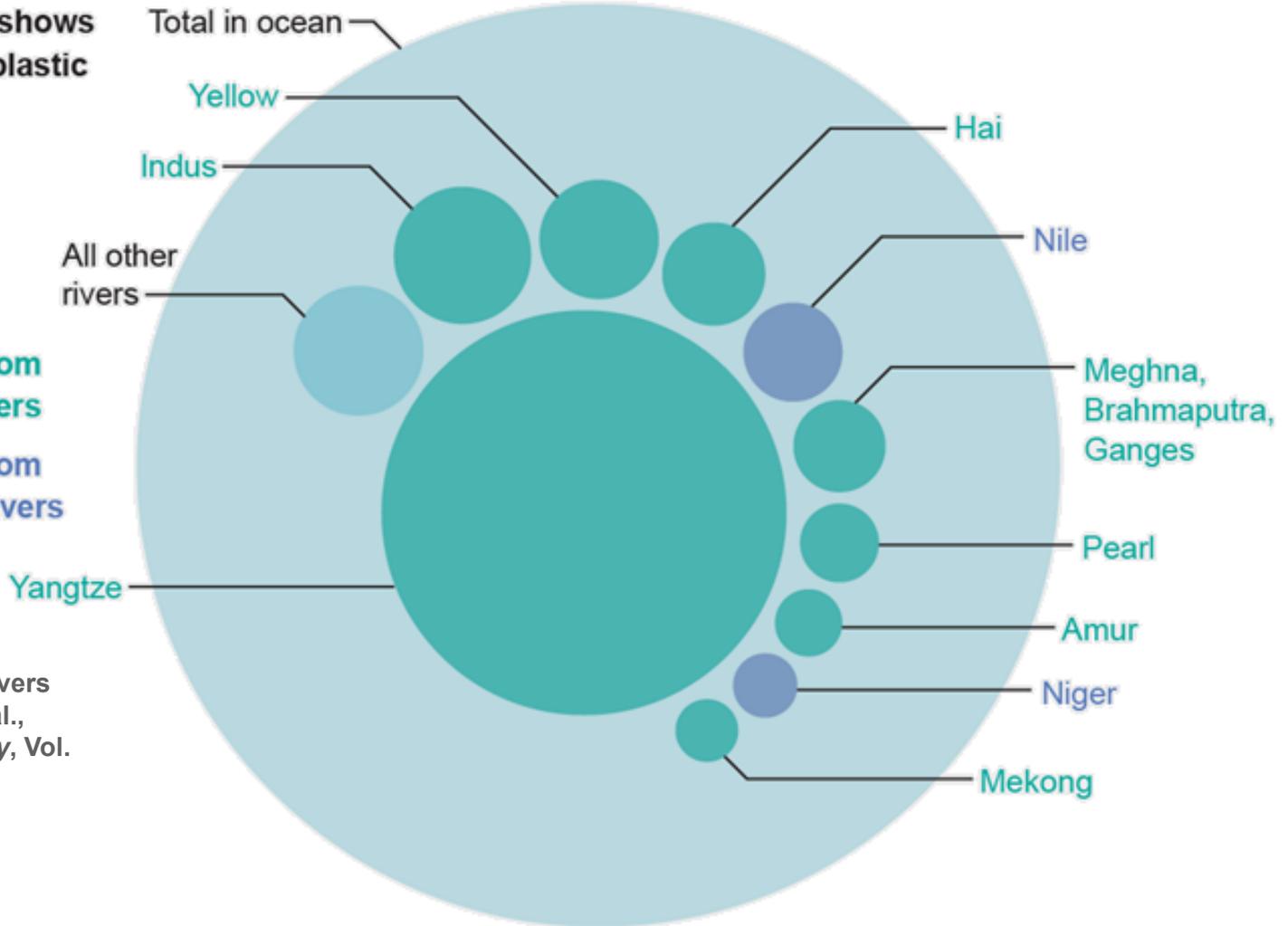
Circle area shows amount of plastic



100,000 metric tons

● Plastic from Asian rivers

● Plastic from African rivers



Source: "Export of Plastic Debris by Rivers into the Sea," by Christian Schmidt et al., in *Environmental Science & Technology*, Vol. 51, No. 21;

What about paper and reusable bags?

- Plastic bags are actually the most sustainable option at the checkout counter, **as long as they are disposed of properly.**

RECYC-QUÉBEC

Québec 

- Recyc-Quebec:

- “The conventional plastic bag ... is the one with the least environmental impacts.”
- “The cotton bag studied is an option that is not recommended ... requiring between 100 and 2,954 uses for its environmental impact to be equivalent to the environmental impacts of the conventional plastic bag.”



What about paper and reusable bags?

- Recyc-Quebec:



- “The paper bag is the least performing bag with 4 to 28 times greater potential impacts than the conventional plastic bag.”
- “The polypropylene woven and polypropylene non-woven bags need an equivalent number of reuses to equal the thin plastic bag ranging from 16 to 98 and 11 to 59, respectively.”
- Studies from the UK and Denmark governments came to the same conclusions.



**Ministry of Environment
and Food of Denmark**
Environmental
Protection Agency



Where are these bags made? **China**

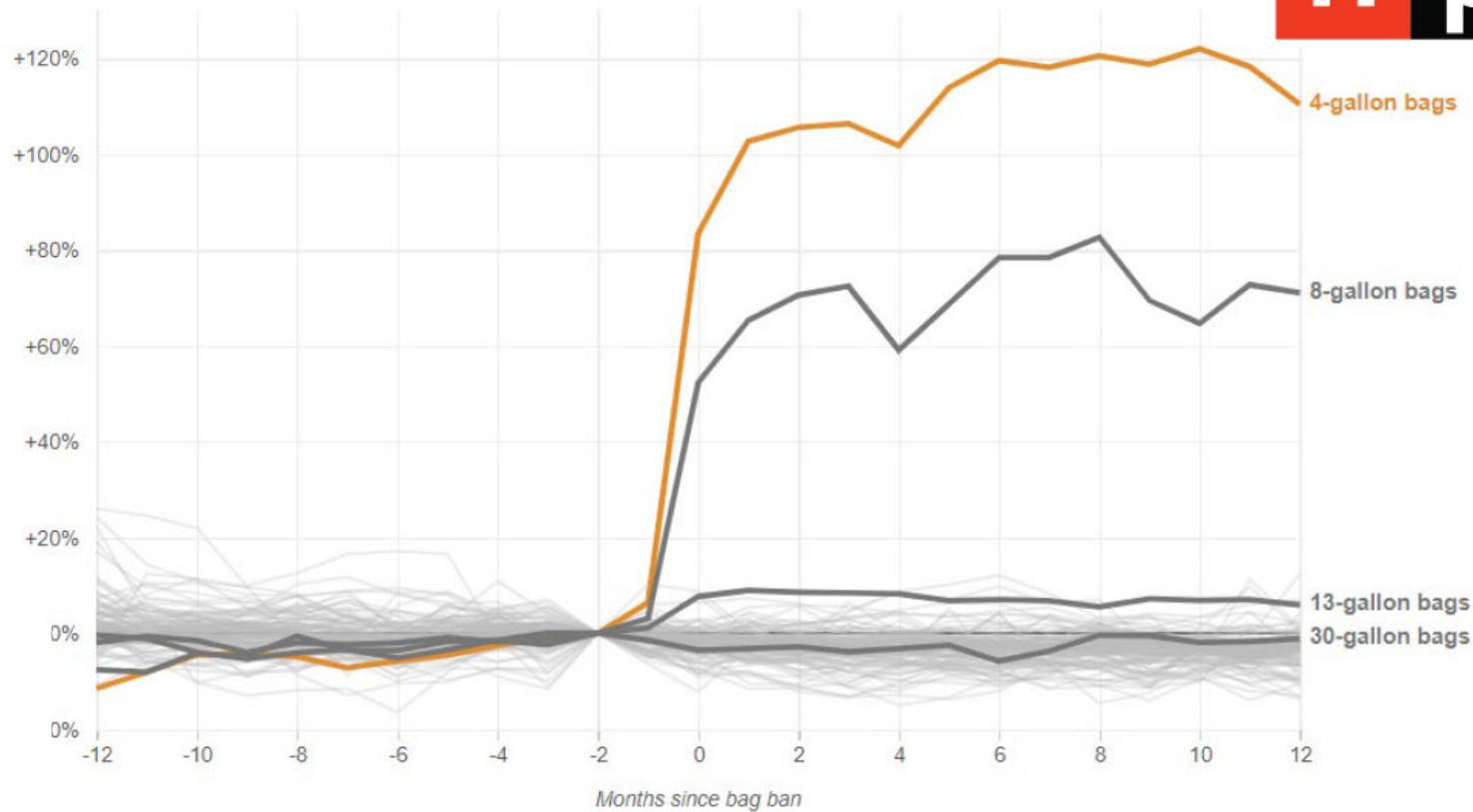


Where are these bags made? **USA**



Unintended Consequences

Trash Bag Sales Jumped After Grocery Bag Bans



What can we do instead of a bag ban?

- Encourage reuse
 - 77.7% of plastic bags are regularly reused.
 - Many reuses: trash bag, pick up after pets, pack your lunch, etc.
- Recycle
 - Usually located at grocery stores and major retail chains.
 - Typically cannot be included in curbside or mixed recycling.



Recycling Plastic Film



Produce Bags



Plastic Shipping Envelopes



Bread Bags



Dry Cleaning Bags



Case Wrap



Air Pillows



Bubble Wrap



Newspaper Bags



Food Storage Bags



Product Overwrap

Also look for any packaging with this How2Recycle label



how2recycle.info

What can we do instead of a bag ban?

- Educate
 - Communities have had success with education campaigns.
 - Don't put plastic bags in your curbside recycling. Take it back to the grocery store or another drop-off location.
- Litter laws
 - Be sure any existing litter laws are working as intended.
- Proper waste receptacles
 - Open top garbage and recycling bins are amongst the worst litterers.



Are plastic bag bans the environmentally friendly thing to do? **No.**

