



PO Box 247  
Westwood, MA 02090  
781.329.8318  
director@ssrcoop.info  
ssrcoop.info

## Position on disposable bag bans

Accepted 3/28/2019

- Costs for both disposal and recycling are increasing. New markets for recyclables will take time to develop. Landfills are closing in Mass., leaving fewer options for cost effective disposal of waste.
- The SSRC supports efforts by its Member Communities to reduce the generation of solid waste, including recyclable items. This will curtail costs, resource depletion and pollution from manufacturing, and litter. Promotion of reusable rather than single use items will help to reduce solid waste.
- It is likely that bans on plastic shopping bags without restrictions on paper bags, such as those locally proposed or adopted, may reduce plastic waste but will increase paper waste in both trash and recycling.
- The Attorney General's Office has ruled that while cities may require businesses to charge a fee for plastic and paper bags, towns cannot.
- Since the bylaws don't include bans on paper bags, and can't mandate a significant fee on paper bags, it is likely that a substantial portion of consumers will take "free" paper bags rather than bringing their own.
- The SSRC is thus concerned that plastic bag bans in their current form will negatively impact our Member Towns' already strained solid waste budgets, and also have unintended environmental impacts.
- Paper bags and other containers are much heavier than their plastic equivalent, have a much larger environmental and greenhouse gas footprint in their manufacture and transport, and are currently costly to recycle.
- If just one third of households opt for paper bags rather than bringing their own (a conservative estimate based on other programs), the net additional costs to our municipal solid waste programs will be about \$1000 per 1000 households. Throughout the South Shore, this would amount to at least \$100,000. These estimates account for the reduction in plastic bag use.
- To reduce negative impacts on Town waste and recycling budgets, the SSRC encourages adoption of bylaws that
  - also ban disposable paper shopping bags, or

- incorporate a requirement for 100% recycled content in paper shopping bags, thus driving needed demand for recycled paper, and helping to reduce recycling costs for paper
- prohibit handles on paper bags, to encourage the use of more convenient handled reusable bags.
- provide for significant educational efforts to help residents understand that best waste practices require reducing use of all sorts of disposable (single-use) items, including disposable shopping bags of any sort. Consistent use of reusable bags reduces waste and recycling, thereby reducing costs to Member Towns and negative environmental impact.

Other factoids:

- Next to food waste, paper comprises the largest segment of both our trash and recycling, at about 27%. (EPA)
- Plastic makes up about 13% of both our trash and recycling. (EPA)
- Paper bags weigh about eight times as much as their functionally equivalent plastic bags.
- Both disposal and single stream recycling cost about \$70-90/ton. Pre-sorted recyclables, such as at our transfer stations, are less costly, especially cardboard and cans.
- Paper making is energy-, chemical-, and water intense.
- The manufacture and transport of a pound of virgin paper generates about 5-6 lbs. of CO<sub>2</sub>, depending on several factors. The number for recycled paper is about 2.5 lbs.
- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for plastic bags are about one third that of functionally equivalent paper bags.

