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## Battle of the bags

[Save the Bay](#) has launched a campaign calling for a statewide ban, or fee, on single-use bags: The focus is plastic bags, but paper bags—which, nationwide, account for the loss of 14 million trees annually—would also be included.

Their proposal sounds aggressive, but *something* needs to be done: Bay Area residents use 3.8 billion plastic bags every year. Average use time is 12 minutes. A million bags end up in the Bay each year.



Here is some myth-busting provided by the campaign:

**Myth:** Plastic bag litter isn't really a problem for the environment.

**Fact:** 1.37 million plastic bags were removed from coastal areas worldwide in one day last year. Plastic trash entangles, suffocates, and poisons at least 267 animal species worldwide. According to the California Coastal Commission, up to 80 percent of all marine debris is plastic, which never biodegrades. Scientists recently measured 334,271 pieces of plastic per square mile in the Great [Pacific Garbage Patch](#).

**Myth:** Recycling plastic bags is the best solution to addressing the litter problem.

**Fact:** Plastic bag recycling is costly and ineffective. Despite a 15-year statewide effort in California, recycling plastic bags has failed. The California Integrated Waste Management

Board estimates that less than 5 percent of all single use plastic bags in the state are actually recycled.

**Myth:** Bans or fees on plastic bags will just push people to use more paper bags.

**Fact:** With well-designed policies that address both plastic and paper bags, consumers will switch to reusable cloth bags. *The legislation supported by Save The Bay and other advocates covers all single-use bags, both paper and plastic.* This is a proven way to decrease the use of both kinds of bags in favor of reusable bags - which are inexpensive and long-lasting - ultimately saving retailers and consumers money. Every year in the U.S, consumers and retailers spend billions of dollars on single-use bags that have an average use time of 12 minutes.

**Myth:** Fees on single use bags will negatively impact low income people.

**Fact:** No one has to pay the fee. A single-use bag fee is only charged if you do not bring your own bag. Lower income communities (some of the most blighted by plastic bag litter) are already paying for plastic bags through city taxes and increased food and retail prices. Every bag fee policy currently under consideration at the local and state level would either subsidize reusable bags for low-income residents or exempt low-income residents from paying the fees.

***Are you convinced? If not, why not, and what do you propose?***

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