

## Plastic Bags Fact Sheet

Worldwide, a trillion single-use plastic bags are used each year, nearly 2 million each minute.

The amount of energy required to make 12 plastic shopping bags could drive a car for a mile.

City, state, and national governments around the world are trying to limit plastic bag litter and waste with bans and fees.

The oldest existing plastic bag tax is in Denmark, passed in 1993. Danes use very few light-weight single-use plastic bags: about 4 per person each year.



At least 16 African countries have announced bans on certain types of plastic bags, to varying levels of effectiveness. Before a ban on thin bags—which tear readily and get caught by the wind—went into effect in 2003, plastic bags were christened South Africa’s “national flower” because of their prevalence in bushes and trees. Thicker bags are taxed.

Many European countries tax plastic bags or ban free distribution. The EU Parliament is discussing measures that could require member states to cut plastic bag use by 80 percent by 2019. A memo on the proposal noted that “plastic bags have been found in stomachs of several endangered marine species,” including various turtles and porpoises, and 94 percent of North Sea birds.

The provinces of Ontario and Quebec have each halved their plastic bag use through a variety of measures, including store incentives for using reusable bags and retailer-imposed fees.

Livestock choking on plastic bags—from camels in the United Arab Emirates to sheep in Mauritania and cattle in India and Texas—have led communities to consider regulation.

Currently 100 billion plastic bags pass through the hands of U.S. consumers every year—almost one bag per person each day. Laid end-to-end, they could circle the equator 1,330 times.

Over 150 U.S. cities and counties ban or require fees for plastic bags. California passed the first statewide ban in 2014, though Hawaii had a de facto ban through county ordinances. Over 49 million Americans live in communities that have passed plastic bag bans or fees.

U.S. cities with bag bans include San Francisco (as of 2007), Portland (2011), Seattle (2012), Austin (2013), Los Angeles (2014), Dallas (to begin in 2015), and Chicago (2015).

The plastics industry has spent millions of dollars to challenge plastic bag ordinances.

Washington, D.C., was the first U.S. city to require food and alcohol retailers to charge customers 5¢ for each plastic or paper bag. Proceeds are shared between stores and environmental clean-ups.

A [timeline](#) tracing the history of the plastic bag and examples of plastic bag ordinances from the [United States](#) and [around the world](#) are at [www.earth-policy.org](http://www.earth-policy.org).