



March 15, 2021

# PAPER OR PLASTIC?

[Environmental \(/full-blog/category/Environmental\)](#)

BY: SCOTT KUNDE

Routine scenario - you are on your way home from a long day of work when you decide to stop by your local Kroger to grab a few things for dinner. As you are checking out, the apathetic, adolescent cashier mumbles “You want paper or plastic?” You’ve been asked this question hundreds of times. For most people, this question generates the automatic response of “plastic.” But why? Is it because people like to “save” their bags? Because I can promise you that the growing pile under your kitchen sink does not need any more bags.

Plastic bags are more than just clutter in the hidden spaces of our homes; they are a major detriment to our environment. Every year, Americans use more than 100 billion plastic bags, with roughly only 1% of those bags ever being recycled.[i] The other 99% are destined to end up in landfills, the ocean, local waterways or just litter on the ground. The plastic bags that make it to landfills will be

take roughly 500 years or more to degrade.[ii] Not only do the plastic bags take half of a millennium to degrade, but they never completely degrade. Instead, they degrade into microplastics that will have continuing detrimental effects on the environment and people's health.[iii] Many of those plastic bags will end up in the ocean and will be the cause of death for more than 100,000 marine animals.[iv] Plastic bags also cause more than \$8 billion dollars in damage to marine ecosystems each year.[v] With more and more research revealing the extreme detrimental that plastic bags have on our environment, how has Kentucky and the other states begun to respond to this issue?



As of November 2020, eight states have outright banned the use of basic single-use plastic bags.[vi] Another twenty states have enacted some sort of legislation that either limits or disincentivizes the use of plastic bags.[vii] The laws in place range from placing additional fees on the use of plastic bags to improving the local recycling programs.[viii] Last year, Kentucky representative Mary Lou Marzian submitted Bill Request 999 to the Kentucky legislature which primarily aimed to ban single-use plastic bags outright by July 1, 2025.[ix] The bill also sought to create a \$100 per day fine for anyone that violated the ban.[x] This was the second time Rep. Marzian presented a bill addressing this issue, and just as with the first attempt, the second attempt failed to gain any

support.[xi] When reviewing the proposed bill, Rep. Jim Gooch stated that the proposed ban on single-use plastics was “just an unnecessary government overreach that would drive up the cost for the average consumer in a way that’s just really not necessary.”[xii]

Although Kentucky has not shown any indication of its intent to limit or ban the use of plastic bags, we as citizens of the Commonwealth can still have an effect. In addition to the classic “write your senator a letter” tactic, we as “average consumers” can encourage the move away from plastic bags through the of good ol’ theory of supply and demand economics. If consumers simply start asking for paper over plastic more often, grocery stores will respond by buying more paper bags instead of plastic. This will lead, slowly but surely, to a move away from single-use plastic bags. Although there is no immediate change on the horizon for the Commonwealth of Kentucky to combat the detrimental effects that single-use plastic bags have on the environment, next time your cashier asks you “paper or plastic?” do yourself, your state, and the environment, a favor and say “paper.”

[i] *10 Facts About Single Use Plastic Bags*, Center for Biological Diversity, [https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population\\_and\\_sustainability/sustainability/plastic\\_bag\\_facts.html](https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/sustainability/plastic_bag_facts.html) [<https://perma.cc/8EGZ-D38R>] (last visited Feb. 9, 2021).

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] *Id.*

[iv] *Id.*

[v] *Legal Limits on Single-Use Plastics and Microplastics: A Global Review of National Laws and Regulations*, Unites Nations (Dec. 15, 2018), <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/publication/legal-limits-single-use-plastics-and-microplastics-global-review-national> [<https://perma.cc/5U7D-AU2E>].

[vi] *State Plastic Bag Legislation*, National Conference for State Legislatures (Nov. 18, 2020), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/environment-and-natural-resources/plastic-bag-legislation.aspx> [<https://perma.cc/R2J3-QEXG>]

[vii] *Id.*

[viii] *Id.*

[ix] *Ky. Bill Would Ban Plastic Bags, Containers, Straws; Release of Plastic Balloons*, KFVS (Jan. 7, 2020, 4:11 PM), <https://www.kfvs12.com/2020/01/07/ky-bill-would-ban-plastic-bags-containers-straws-release-plastic-balloons/> [<https://perma.cc/V83P-SNYY>].

[x] *Id.*

[xi] Danielle Grady, *Are You Ready For Plastic Bag Ban And Is Kentucky?*, Leowekly, <https://www.leowekly.com/2020/01/ready-plastic-bag-ban-kentucky/> [<https://perma.cc/D4P4-56XW>] (last visited Feb. 9, 2021).

[xii] *Id.*

Tagged: [single-use plastic \(/full-blog/tag/single-use+plastic\)](/full-blog/tag/single-use+plastic/), [environment \(/full-blog/tag/environment\)](/full-blog/tag/environment/), [groceries \(/full-blog/tag/groceries\)](/full-blog/tag/groceries/)

♥ 0 Likes    ↪ Share

COMMENTS (0)

Newest First

[Preview](#)    [POST COMMENT...](#)

Newer Post

[Restoring the Legacy of Black Farmers \(/full-blog/marshallblog2\)](/full-blog/marshallblog2/)

Older Post

[A story of perseverance: How India's farmers are fighting back \(/full-blog/luceroBlog1\)](/full-blog/luceroBlog1/)

SEARCHABLE ARCHIVE (/PUBLICATION-ARCHIVE-1)

631 SOUTH LIMESTONE, LEXINGTON, KY

40508 (859) 257-4747 [BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM](mailto:BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM) (MAILTO:BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM)