

Banning Plastic Bags

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Banning Plastic Bags

The connection between human beings and nature is widely discussed nowadays. Unfortunately, it bears a negative connotation in the majority of cases because of improper waste disposal, water contamination associated with manufacturing activities, deforestation, and air pollution caused by the increased number of vehicles, etc. This situation can be improved when maintaining positive alterations step by step for people to get used to them. For example, the use of shopping plastic bags can be discussed as one of the main triggers of land pollution. Many countries have already agreed that this is a significant problem that requires interventions. As a result, their governments start developing policies aimed at the reduction of plastic bags usage. For instance, in some US states shoppers are charged with up to \$10 if they use this kind of a container (Rujnic-Sokele et al. 42). The fees are taken at the checkout of retail and grocery stores. However, the effectiveness of this interventions is still not proved maybe because it is used only locally. Even though it is comfortable to use plastic bags on the everyday basis and when packing fast food, their common utilization at retail and grocery stores should be prohibited, because of adverse influences on nature and people, recycling issues, and existence of environmentally friendly alternatives.

Background on the Issue

Shoppers got used to the availability of plastic bags so their absence or additional fees make them rather dissatisfied, which affects businesses negatively. However, many people become highly concerned with environmental problems and realize the necessity of a change. The major harm from plastic bags is put on aquatic

life. They exude toxins and pollute lakes, rivers, and oceans, which affects ocean economy. As a result, flora and fauna are also impacted adversely. What is more, human beings experience negative health influences. As it is too late to undertake proactive measures, such expensive operations as the cleanup and recycling are to be considered. However, focusing on the future, significant changes can be made only when people stop using plastic shopping bags. Appropriate legislation is needed to reach improvements for the environment and receive financial advantages connected with the reduced expenses related to fees and taxes for the cleanup and recycling.

Plastic Bags and Their Influence on the Environment

Environmental issues connected with the usage of plastic bags started in the 1970s. At that time, the collaboration between the US oil and gas industries led to the creation of an innovative product that became extremely popular in the 20th century. Even now about 100 billion plastic bags are used annually in the USA alone (Muthu et al. 210). Still, the representatives of the plastic industry consider that it is not a problem because these containers can be recycled. Unfortunately, statistical reports estimate that only 5% of plastic bags are recycled while the rest of them go to landfill. It is extremely harmful because their producers use huge amounts of oil during the manufacturing phase, and plastic bags are then absorbed by the soil. Plastic bags cause physical contamination of land and water as they remain in the same state for about 1000 years before they decay (Rujnic-Sokele et al. 41). In this way, they become rubbish that worsens the whole image of the country and influences tourism adversely.

Plastic containers can be easily obtained in any shop, so people prefer to throw them away rather than to bother about their reuse and recycling (He 408). They do not

think about such drawbacks as high energy costs, harmful chemicals, and landfill content. Plastic bags cannot biodegrade, which is critical because this inability deals with the adverse influences on nature. Eco-functional characteristics of plastic bags are rather poor regardless of the fact that they pose a minimal threat to the main marine species (Muthu et al. 2009; Rujnic-Sokele et al. 45). They still can clog the drainage system and streamline the spread of water-associated diseases (Synthia et al. 184). Thus, it is critical to think of the ways to minimize their usage.

Anti-Bag Policies

Trying to improve the situation, countries implement anti-plastic bag policies. Zen et al. emphasize that intervention should be aligned with both educational and awareness campaigns (1260). For now, their effects are minimal, but improvement is expected with the course of time. The current state of these initiatives can be explained by the fact that the representatives of the general public do not accept these policies because of their habits and personal beliefs. However, they are still considered to be the best option and are often used not only by governments but also by manufacturers and retailers. For instance, positive changes were observed in China, as the usage of plastic bags reduced by about 50% due to the product taxation that is accepted by some shops (He 429). Thus, such an intervention is likely to benefit many other countries.

Recycling Difficulties and Plastic Bag Alternatives

Even though plastic bags and their alternatives are very similar, the last ones are easier to recycle. All in all, this option is rather costly that is why developing countries are not likely to consider it. Of course, it is possible to gather enough money if their

governments increase taxes and search for donations. However, it seems to be better for the economy to resort to the alternative containers, as this option is less costly and more environmentally friendly.

Plastics are constantly generated because they are used to manufacture various items. However plastic packing itself comprises more than 95% of the total amount (Muthu et al. 208). After its usage, it turns into about 70% of plastic waste, 50% of which is recyclable (Muthu et al. 208). Even though the representatives of the general public can utilize paper and woven bags, the majority of them still prefer plastic ones (Muthu et al. 208). Such tendency can be proved by the fact that they do not want to change their habits and use those things that are easier to obtain. Still, it seems to be more reasonable that “98% of respondents mistakenly believe these new bags to be eco-friendly or biodegradable” (Synthia et al. 183). In this way, additional education on this topic would be rather advantageous in the war on plastic bags.

Advantages of Plastic Bags

Even though a lot of information was reported to prove that plastic bags harm the environment and human beings, there is enough evidence to claim that they also have a range of advantages. For instance, professionals who work in the sphere of fast food reveal that this type of containers is better to use when packing their products. According to the research results, they turn out to provide the users with a cheap and hygienic way to transport food and products (Rujnic-Sokele et al. 46). Thus, it is safer and healthier to use them instead of all other alternatives.

What is more, a lot of the representatives of the plastic industry emphasize the fact that plastic bags are easy to dispose. It makes them convenient for mass

production. What is more, they attract consumers' attention because they are "lightweight, strong, waterproof and seemingly free of charge" (He 411). Finally, professionals who work in the plastic industry also emphasize the fact that plastic bags can be used to reduce energy needs. As waste, they have a high calorific value, which can be used "in the production of hot water, steam and electricity" (Rujnic-Sokele et al. 44). However, those disadvantages that are connected with plastic bags are more critical than their advantages. Thus, changes are needed to prevent their utilization on the general basis at least in shops.

Conclusion

With the course of time, scientists and representatives of the general public started paying more attention to the issue of nature preservation, as they have realized that immediate changes are needed to improve the situation and ensure that the planet will be able to accept the following generations. They pay much attention to the usage of plastic bags because they affect the environment adversely, polluting water and soil, and affecting health of animals and human beings. Thus, it is vital for the governmental bodies to establish policies that encourage citizens to stop using plastic bags and increase recycling activities. In addition to that, they should be encouraged to use plastic bag alternatives, such as paper and woven bags, as they are more friendly towards the environment, can be easily recycled, and do not worsen nature's condition that much. A lot of attention should be paid to the checkouts of retail and grocery stores because people tend to buy plastic bags there. Sufficient reduction of their usage can be reached if these containers are removed and substituted by eco-friendly alternatives.

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