

Ripple Effect #46

BANNING THE BAG

The year 2007 marks the 30th anniversary of the plastic shopping bag. In this short period of time worldwide consumption has reached an estimated 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags per year.

Although single use plastic bags are given out for free almost everywhere you go; the hidden costs of these bags make them far from free. They are resource intensive to produce and non biodegradable, reportedly taking up to 1,000 years to break down. Plastic bag litter has become epidemic creating an eyesore in our communities, clogging drains and ditches which can contribute to localized flooding, and are harmful to wildlife.

As the hidden costs of these bags have come to the fore front several countries have sprung into action. Australia, Bangladesh, India, Ireland, Italy, South Africa, Taiwan, and Hong Kong have all made steps toward banning or discouraging the use of plastic bags. Ireland for example, has reduced its plastic shopping bag usage by 95% through the introduction of their PlasTax , a tax on plastic bags.

This growing international movement to ban or discourage plastic bag use is beginning to stir a response within Canada and the United States. In March, San Francisco became the first city in North America to ban the use of traditional plastic grocery bags. The city's Department of the Environment said San Francisco uses 181 million plastic grocery bags annually. It has been estimated that the ban would save 450,000 gallons of oil a year and remove the need to send 1,400 tons of debris now sent annually to landfills.

Closer to home, Leaf Rapids, a northern Manitoba town (approximately 980 km NE from Winnipeg) of less than 600 citizens led the Country last May when they placed a three-cent levy on single use bags. The community topped that effort this month when they became the first rural municipality within Canada to ban plastic shopping bags in stores. An Ontario company, Instore Products Ltd., has donated 5,000 clothlike, reusable shopping bags, which the town has been giving to its residents to help them prepare for the ban.

Don't wait for a ban to come to your community before you start making changes. Act now and do your part to reduce plastic shopping bag waste by using reusable bags when you shop. You can checkout reusablebags.com to learn more about the problem and view their wide range of reusable bags.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org.

