

# Fact Checking the American Chemistry Council

**Who is the American Chemistry Council?** The ACC is an industry trade association for chemical companies. To date they have spent more than \$2.5 million lobbying against grassroots campaigns to reduce plastic bag litter.

**Are their claims always true? No.**

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"Plastic bag use in Ireland went up after the imposition of a bag tax."

- Carryout bag use has declined 90 percent since Ireland's fee was enacted in 2002. Claims that consumers are purchasing more bags in bulk for household use are meaningless because no base data on their use exists. (Source: Ronan Mulhall, Ireland's Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government, testimony to the DC Council, 2009)

"More than 90 percent of Americans report that they reuse their plastic grocery bags as trash can liners, for packing lunches, picking up after pets and other household uses. Taxing 'free' bags simply punishes and adds another burden on working families that currently get these bags with their groceries and extensively reuse them."

- The bags aren't free—the store buys them and builds that cost into the price of the merchandise. Customers who don't take a bag are then subsidizing those who do, and it raises the cost of the merchandise for everyone. Making the cost of the bag (both in purchase and disposal) more transparent allows consumers to make the choice that is right for them.

- The cited "reuses" are one-time reuses, and the bags still get thrown out with the trash; there is no reduction in the amount of waste going to landfills or incinerators, or in the cost to the jurisdiction for waste management.

- Many types of reusable bags and containers exist for packing lunches.

- Other types of bags, not included in the fee, can be used for trash can liners and pet waste (e.g., produce bags, bread bags, newspaper bags).

- Pet owners take on numerous responsibilities in the care of their pets; finding solutions to dispose of the waste is among those, and certainly far from the greatest expense of responsible ownership.

"Bans or restrictions on plastic bags do not prevent litter" (e.g., San Francisco)

- San Francisco's ban is only on plastic bags from the largest grocery stores, a different model. The Maryland proposal includes paper bags in order to encourage use of reusable bags, rather than a simple switch from plastic to paper.

- Volunteers in Washington, DC reported a decrease of 60% in plastic bags collected during a cleanup in April 2010, over the same event in 2009. This is just three months after DC's fee took effect. (Source: Alice Ferguson Foundation)

"Taxing plastic bags would destroy existing recycling programs"

- Many cities now accept bags for recycling at curbside collection.

- We have been recycling for more than 20 years, and litter is still a problem. It is time for a new approach.

- The market for recyclable material is very weak in this economy, and cities now pay for recycling, rather than earning revenue off the materials.

- This point suggests that the fee would be superlatively successful in reducing use of disposable bags, a contradiction to their claims about Ireland and San Francisco.

"inadequately sanitized reusable bags harbor bacteria that could cause food-borne illness"

- Many reusable bags are washable, and consumers should take care of them as they would any other household item, particularly those used in food preparation.

- Do studies exist on the bacteria living on grocery carts, and on other public surfaces?