
PLASTIC BAGS IN PROVINCETOWN

Yes, they are handy for picking up after your dog, or for keeping your bike seat dry in a downpour. But when they escape our grasp, lightweight plastic bags are prone to blowing in the wind until they snag up in a tree, bush, hedge, or ocean near you, where they remain until they photo-degrade into countless tiny pieces of high-density polyethylene or other polymer, or are eaten by turtles whose favorite food is jellyfish, or are flushed through a storm drain where they can block passage of runoff and create problems for municipal drainage systems.

Time to change the game!



A plastic bag caught in a tree at the Stop n' Shop parking lot.
L. Ludwig, photo

The RREC proposes to reduce the distribution of single-use plastic bags beginning 4/15/15. If approved by voters, the bags that would be covered in the bylaw are those handed out at stores and restaurants which are single-use, "fly-away" grocery-style bags. Bags not affected by the proposed bylaw are those used for dry cleaning, produce and meat at the supermarket, newspaper delivery bags, and bags provided around town for pet cleanup purposes. See the Town Warrant for detailed information.



This brochure brought to you by Provincetown RREC and the Barnstable County Cooperative Extension Office

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Provincetown Recycling and Renewable Energy Committee

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PLASTIC BAGS AND PROVINCETOWN: LET'S DO THIS!



Town Meeting October 27, 2014

**Article 8 - General Bylaw
Amendment /Plastic Bag Reduction**

**[http://www.provincetown-ma.gov/
DocumentCenter/View/4307](http://www.provincetown-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/4307)**

Plastic Bags in Provincetown - Time to Change the Game



The proposed by-law targets lightweight plastic bags which are often seen snagged in tree branches.

The Recycling and Renewable Energy Committee (RREC) is a volunteer group of Provincetown residents with a directive to increase recycling and reduce solid

waste within the community.

At the Spring 2014 Town Meeting, the RREC presented a by-law to reduce the use of plastic bags in our town. While there was a considerable groundswell of support for the measure, several key details needed to be worked out before the town body could feel comfortable with the by-law language.

To prepare for the Fall Town Meeting, the RREC has reached out to the Provincetown retail sector to help craft a by-law that targets the “fly-away” grocery bags and encourages the use of durable and reusable bags.

If approved, the measure will go into effect on April 15, 2015.

RECYCLING ISN'T IN THE BAG What percentage of plastic bags are recycled?

In 2012, 7.62 billion pounds of plastic film (bags, wraps, sacks) were produced in the US (EPA figure). In that same year, only 1.02 billion pounds of postconsumer film (which includes plastic bags and product wrap) was acquired for recycling. This suggests that only 13.5% of plastic film was recovered for recycling (Moore Recycling data).



Loggerhead turtle (Caretta caretta) caught in a grocery bag. Florida Keys Wildlife Rescue, photo

Who collects the bags for recycling?

Retail stores are the most common and most effective collection location for plastic film. There are some municipally-run drop-off and curbside collection programs for plastic film, however, these are not as effective as retail drop-off programs because of the high level of contamination that occurs, which means some of the collected plastic film may not get recycled, or if it does, it is sold at a much lower value. Contamination occurs if the film is not clean and dry or if non-polyethylene film is mixed in. The Provincetown Stop n'

Shop plans to continue collecting plastic bags for recycling, even if they cannot distribute them as a result of the by-law. Plastic bags are not accepted in the curbside recycling program, and they are handled as waste at the transfer station.

What about “compostable” and “biodegradable” plastic bags?

These bags require very specific temperature and moisture conditions to fulfill their claims, such as are found in an industrial composting facility. Unfortunately, few “compostable” bags ever make it to such a facility, and when loose in the environment will break down into microplastic debris.

Are there other towns in Massachusetts with plastic bag laws?

Not surprisingly, Nantucket led the state with a plastic bag ban in 1990. Several other municipalities have followed suit, though it took another two decades: Manchester-by-the-Sea approved a bag ban in July 2013, Brookline residents voted in their ban at the end of 2013, Great Barrington and Marblehead began their bans in 2014, and several other towns have regulations up for vote this year. A state-wide regulation has also been proposed.