San Francisco’s Plastic Bag Ban

Plastic bags are well known to have significant environmental impacts, including not being able to biodegrade quickly. In 2007, San Francisco banned plastic shopping bags. While San Francisco was an earlier adopter of this trend within the United States, it is far from alone. Several countries including Ireland, the Philippines, and Taiwan have introduced different types of control over plastic bags. In California, a number of counties and cities are now considering similar regulations, but without taking into account what green chemistry may contribute.

This project could be developed in the following integrated framework:

**Technology Development:** Design the greenest shopping bag. In developing your criteria of greenness, consider production, use, and end of life issues for your bag. Evaluate whether renewable materials could be used, whether plastics can be designed to biodegrade, identify what alternatives exist and compare their chemistries.

**Policy:** Has the bag ban reduced the environmental impact of businesses in San Francisco? At what cost, and to whom? Evaluate whether the plastic bag ban stimulates green chemistry innovation effectively. How could future bag regulations be implemented that improve on the SF model? Consider other regulatory tools or even economic incentives.

**Business:** Analyze the positions of different industry actors including plastic bag manufacturers, retailers, and alternatives manufacturers on the ban. Determine the business considerations that these different actors may have in retaining traditional plastic bags, or developing greener bags. Prepare a business case for adopting your bag.

For more information, see:

“Environmental Politics 2009 Plastic Shopping Bag Bans”


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