





R-32

Date: June 5, 2007

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember Patrick O'Donnell, Fourth District 
Vice Mayor Bonnie Lowenthal, First District 

Subject: **Plastic Bag Reduction and Recycling Program**

The City currently has a dedicated bureau within the Public Works Department to educate the public and execute the city's recycling efforts. The Environmental Services Bureau is tasked with developing and ensuring the city's compliance with state and federal recycling standards. Additional City programs, including Litter Free Long Beach, aim to educate the public about reusing and recycling.

One of the least recycled and most destructive items is plastic grocery bags. Annually, 19 billion plastic bags are used within California—9 billion of which are used within Los Angeles County alone. The US EPA estimates that only one percent of plastic bags are recycled. Plastic bags make up a large component of landfills, do not decompose and it's estimated that nearly 100,000 marine animals are killed each year because of plastic bags.

At a time when energy prices continue to rise, it is also important to note the high production costs of these bags. 1.7 billion dollars are spent annually in Southern California to compensate for the trash maximum daily loads (TMDLs) discarded into our waterways. Plastic bags are a large component of this costly waste. Additionally, it takes an approximate 430,000 gallons of oil to produce 100 million plastic bags.

Plastic bag usage and recycling have become a major focus throughout the nation and the world. San Francisco recently became the first US city to ban plastic bags, giving large supermarkets the option of using compostable corn starch bags or recycled paper bags. In Canada, the province of Ontario has formed a public-private partnership to work with grocer and retail associations to create incentive programs for consumers who use reusable cloth or canvas bags. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors recently voted to study the feasibility of a ban. In addition, several local grocery stores have begun offering recycled bags for customers. Other local government initiatives to address this problem include curbside bag collection programs and citywide education programs.

Recommended Action:

Request the City Manager and the Environmental Committee to work with the Environmental Services Bureau, appropriate staff, business stakeholders and members of the environmental community to develop a proposal for a Long Beach Plastic Bag Reduction program. The components of this program may include, but are not limited to, consumer incentives and recycling programs.