

Dumb Oil and Gas Majors, Scrapping Plastic Bans and Taxes and San Francisco

Michael Stephen, an international expert on bioplastics, shares his thoughts and opinion on important issues impacting the bioplastics industry. Today, Michael writes about how the oil & gas majors could have been so dumb, scrapping the plastic bag bans and taxes and San Francisco.



Michael Stephen

How could the oil & gas majors be so dumb?

The US National Public radio March 31, 2020 “For decades, Americans have been sorting their trash believing that most plastic could be recycled. But the truth is, the vast majority of all plastic produced can’t be or won’t be recycled.

In a joint investigation, NPR and the PBS series Frontline found that oil and gas companies — the makers of plastic — have known that all along, even as they spent millions of dollars telling the American public the opposite.

Starting in the late 1980s, the plastics industry spent tens of millions of dollars promoting recycling through ads, recycling projects and public relations, telling people plastic could be and should

be recycled. But their own internal records dating back to the 1970s show that industry officials long knew that recycling plastic on a large scale was unlikely to ever be economically viable.

A top official, who led SPI for more than a decade, says the strategy to push recycling was simple: “The feeling was the plastics industry was under fire, we had to do what it takes to take the heat off, because we want to continue to make plastic products,” he says. “If the public thinks that recycling is working, then they’re not going to be as concerned about the environment.”

The plastics industry was under attack for one reason – that if plastics get into the open environment they can lie or float around for decades. They could have solved this problem by making the plastic products with oxo-biodegradable technology so that they would become biodegradable and would be recycled back into nature by bacteria and fungi.

Instead they ignored (and even opposed) this technology, which has been proven since the 1970s, and spent millions of dollars trying to pull the wool over the eyes of American consumers.

It is not too late for them to change their ways, and to enter into a constructive dialogue with the Oxo-biodegradable Plastics Association <http://www.biodeg.org>

Scrapping the plastic bag bans and taxes

In one State and City after another, the bans on single-use plastic shopping bags are being repealed. The bag-banners are fighting back by arguing that plastic bags are causing climate change. These bags are definitely causing long-term pollution of the open environment, unless they are made oxo-biodegradable, but it is rather far-fetched to blame them for climate-change. They actually have a lower global-warming potential than paper, jute, or bio-based plastic – See <https://www.biodeg.org/life-cycle-assessments/life-cycle-assessments-2/>

The banners are also criticising the academic research which says that re-usable bags are a breeding-ground for dangerous microbes, but you don’t need to be a genius to realise that a brand-new lightweight carrier bag given to you at the checkout is likely to be less dangerous than a bag which has been used dozens of times, and has probably never been washed inside or outside.

San Francisco

The Washington Times reported on 2nd April “San Francisco has reversed its 13-year ban on plastic bags and will now prohibit the reusable bags city leaders once championed, because of the coronavirus. San Francisco is not the only place that has reversed its reusable bag policy, but it is certainly the most surprising. The city was at the forefront of eliminating single-use plastic bags in 2007.

At that time, San Francisco's board of supervisors linked plastic bags to a litany of scourges, including litter, climate change, big oil and endangering sea life. But the coronavirus has changed all of that. As of Thursday afternoon, California was one of the states most ravaged by the virus, reporting 10,000 cases and 200 deaths in its population of almost 40 million."

THE VERGE 2ND April 2020 "With grocery stores being one of the few places still open during COVID-19 lockdowns, disposable plastic bags are making a comeback as some people fear that reusable bags could spread the disease. Before the pandemic, a growing number of governments banned single-use plastic bags in an effort to cut down on waste. But as the novel coronavirus has spread around the globe, people have gotten leery about coming in close contact with other people and their possessions, including reusable bags. On March 31st, New Hampshire became the first state in the US to temporarily ban reusable bags during the pandemic.

"For whatever reason, people seem to get very fired up about grocery bags," says Meghan May, a professor of microbiology and infectious disease at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine. "Ordinarily I use [reusable bags] all the time because I live in a beach town and a clean ocean is really important," May tells The Verge. But now she and many others are thinking twice."

HAWAII TRIBUNE HERALD 2nd April 2020 "Mayor Harry Kim issued his third Supplementary Emergency Proclamation late Wednesday, suspending the ban on single-use plastic bags."

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Just weeks ago, cities and even states across the U.S. were busy banning straws, limiting takeout containers and mandating that shoppers bring reusable bags or pay a small fee as the movement to eliminate single-use plastics took hold in mainstream America.

What a difference a pandemic makes. In a matter of days, bans to reduce the use of plastics — and particularly plastic shopping sacks — across the U.S. have come under fire amid worries about the virus clinging to reusable bags, cups and straws. Governors in Massachusetts and Illinois have banned or strongly discouraged the use of reusable grocery bags. Oregon suspended its brand-new ban on plastic bags this week, and cities from Bellingham, Washington, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, have announced a hiatus on plastic bag bans as the coronavirus rages.

Michael Stephen

Michael Stephen is a lawyer and was a member of the United Kingdom Parliament, where he served on the Environment Select Committee.

When he left Parliament Symphony Environmental Technologies Plc. attracted his attention because of his interest in the environment.

He is now Deputy Chairman of Symphony, which is listed on the AIM market of the London Stock Exchange, and is the founder and Chairman of the Oxo-biodegradable Plastics Association.

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