



PIMA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

A RESOLUTION OF THE PIMA ASSOCIATION OF (PAG) TO ENCOURAGE ITS MEMBER JURISDICTIONS TO ADOPT COMPREHENSIVE AND COORDINATED MEASURES TO REDUCE THE POLLUTION RESULTING FROM THE IMPROPER DISPOSAL OF PLASTIC BAGS

WHEREAS, each year, in eastern Pima County, including the City of Tucson, approximately 182.5 million plastic carryout bags are used as packaging.¹ An unknown, but significant number litter roadways and desert areas; and

WHEREAS, discarded plastic bags often become entangled in vegetation resulting in a negative impact on our quality of life and the environment; and

WHEREAS, the improvement of the visual appearance of our transportation corridors has been identified as a major concern for tourism and economic development;² and

WHEREAS, the Pima Association of Governments, member jurisdictions, and community and business organizations have joined to conduct cleanups along major transportation corridors to improve their visual appearance; and

WHEREAS, the community has a duty to protect the natural environment, the economy, and the health of its citizens;

WHEREAS, discarded plastic bags impose significant environmental impacts³, and

WHEREAS, the widespread use of reusable bags provide an alternative to plastic bags;⁴ and

WHEREAS, the use of reusable bags can be increased and use of plastic bags can be reduced through a combination of retail store employee training, incentives, and public education programs; and

¹ This estimate is derived from the following calculation: Population of one million assume 250,000 are shoppers. Each shopper makes a purchase each day resulting in two plastic bags/shopper/day. 500,000 bags per day x 365 days per year equals 182,500,000 per year. The number of plastic bags that become litter is estimated to be from 1 to 2 percent. <http://www.enviroliteracy.org/article.php/1268.html> Some quick facts about plastic bags: http://retail.commandpackaging.com/encore_facts.asp and <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/graphic/2007/10/03/GR2007100301385.html?referrer=emailink>

² Tucson Regional Economic Opportunities (TREO) has highlighted visual blight as a serious economic development concern.

³ Environmental impacts include the breakdown of plastic bags into small particles, wildlife being trapped in or ingesting plastic bags, and the visual pollution associated with plastic bag litter.

⁴ Reusable bags allow shoppers to avoid the use of plastic bags altogether.

WHEREAS, several countries have banned or taken action to discourage the use of plastic bags, including the Republic of Ireland, which has achieved a dramatic decrease in plastic bag usage by imposing a substantial fee on the use of plastic bags;⁵

WHEREAS, in Pima County, local governments and State agencies spend substantial amounts each year on prevention, cleanup, and enforcement activities to reduce litter in waterways, and parks and roads;⁶ and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the PAG Regional Council urges member jurisdictions to adopt comprehensive and coordinated measures to reduce pollution resulting from the improper disposal of plastic bags ; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that measures to be adopted could include, increasing penalties associated with the littering of plastic bags, requiring businesses conducting retail sales to have available for sale and offering at each transaction reusable tote bags in place of plastic bags, requiring businesses conducting retail sales to offer a recycling collection bin for plastic bags, imposing fees on the use of plastic bags in retail transactions, and/or banning the use of plastic bags in retail sales, provided that the ban is effective throughout Pima County.

⁵ Outright bans have been adopted in some countries and other locations, including California, have adopted measures to discourage their use. Information on these measures can be accessed through http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic_shopping_bag

⁶ There is no study that identifies a specific cost associated with cleaning up plastic bag litter. While the total amount spent on litter control may be significant, the total volume of plastic bag litter may represent a small portion of the total cost of litter cleanup, though plastic bag litter may represent a disproportionate visual impact.