

Stand up to Big Plastic
[Andrew Korfhage](#) (May 16, 2011)

Disposable plastic bag manufacturers are waging a misinformation campaign that even targets the individual companies that offer green shoppers reusable bag options.



What will our grandchildren think of the disposable plastic bag?

Will they see it as a relic of a bygone era?

It depends on the winner in a number of battles now playing out both in state and local governments, and between the bag manufacturers themselves.



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If Oregon succeeds in passing the nation's first statewide ban on plastic bags, it will be over the strenuous objections of the plastics industry, led by South Carolina-based bag manufacturer Hilex Poly. Opponents in the plastic industry have waged an all-out campaign to deny that plastic bags pose a threat to the environment, even raising fears about the safety of reusable bags, breathlessly pointing to studies that show that unwashed bags — like any unwashed fabric — can carry bacteria.

Plastic-bag manufacturers using similar tactics helped defeat a previous statewide bag-ban bill in California last year, and have taken on local initiatives all across the country.

In each case — both in Oregon and in California — state legislators have sought not only to protect their local environments, but also to standardize retail practices across two states already dotted with city- and county-level bans. Nationwide, 21 local communities have taken action to ban plastic bags, with Evanston, IL currently debating whether to become the 22nd. Other communities have chosen to tax the bags instead, with Montgomery County, Maryland, passing a five-cent plastic-bag tax on May 3.

Why all the fuss?

In Montgomery County, officials cited pollution to local streams and rivers that lead directly to the Chesapeake Bay, and from there, to the Atlantic Ocean, where scientists have identified a collection of plastic debris comparable to the better-known “Pacific garbage patch” that’s widely described as being twice the size of Texas.

There are other good reasons to avoid plastic bags — from the petroleum products used in their manufacture to their effect on wildlife when ingested — which is why many shoppers choose to carry their own reusable bags, whether their local community taxes or bans them or not.

But now, the forces behind the current misinformation campaign in Oregon and others aimed at bag bans at the community level are even attacking companies that offer green-minded shoppers a reusable bag option.

A lawsuit making its way through the U.S. Circuit Court in South Carolina targets California-based reusable-bag manufacturer ChicoBag. Led again by Hilex Poly (along with Superbag Operating Ltd. and Advance Polybag), the suit alleges that ChicoBag “deceptively communicates that ChicoBag’s products are superior to plastic bags, such as those sold by Hilex, with regard to environmental impact” and seeks to end all advertising suggesting that reusable bags represent an “alleged environmental superiority.”

It’s a move that smacks of desperation.

The plastic-bag facts used on ChicoBag’s Web site to promote reusable bags over

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Page 2 of 3

disposable plastics are clear and verifiable. They're collected from the Environmental Protection Agency, *The Wall Street Journal*, NOAA, the United Nations, and the Ocean Conservancy.

"I welcome the opportunity to engage with these corporate giants in a fair and impartial courtroom," says Andy Keller, president of ChicoBag. "Plastic bag manufacturers...have spent millions of dollars trying to persuade voters and elected officials against single-use bag legislation...[A]nd now they are trying to sue a small entrepreneurial company into silence."

So, if Hilex Poly has its way, our grandchildren will still be pulling plastic bags out of trees and streams long after we're gone, and our oceanic garbage patches will only continue to grow.

Don't let them win. Take your reusable bags every time you shop. Wash them like you wash the rest of your linens to keep them clean. And like Andy Keller and the leaders in Oregon, stand up to Big Plastic if they ever try to tell your town how to run its business.

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Page 3 of 3