

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- Bags have been under serious attack in Canada
- Over the past 18 months have fought off multiple votes across the country – city councils and government organizations
- And we have won.
- Greater Vancouver Waste Management Committee
- The Union of BC Municipalities
- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- The Association of Manitoba Municipalities
- Northumberland and Simcoe Counties in Ontario

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- And in a number of cities – Sherbrooke Quebec, Toronto Ontario, Charlottetown Prince Edward Island and raft of cities in the province of Ontario – Ottawa, London, Sault Ste Marie, Brockville, Timmins, North Bay
- Here are some of the headlines we have been dealing with:
- “City set to trash plastic sacks”
- “Taxing plastic shopping bags not the answer”
- “Tax cuts plastic bags in trees but not in dumps”

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- The battle has been on three fronts:
 1. Call to ban non-biodegradable bags – mandate only biodegradables
Fall 2005 in Quebec
 2. Call to tax bags similar to Ireland
Summer and Fall 2006 in BC
 3. Call to ban bags across the country following the Leaf Rapids,
Manitoba ban of the bags this April

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- The attacks have been mostly driven by lower levels of government/ municipal councillors with strong environmentalist backgrounds

What happened

Province of Quebec – a win for the industry 2005

- Call for a ban on non-biodegradables by a local member of parliament – private members bill to mandate on biodegradable plastic bags
- Fought this battle by educating the media and government on the facts – setting the record straight – largely a government relations campaign
- Focused messages on technology and science
- Bill was defeated in a vote in the legislature

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

Province of British Columbia – a major win for the industry Fall 2006

- Call for a tax on bags at check out by municipal councillors similar to Ireland situation
- Driven by an activist municipal councillor who shopped the tax resolution with cities in BC and PEI to a series of influential government organizations – Union of BC Municipalities, Federation of Canadian Municipalities and Association of Manitoba Municipalities
- Tax was defeated in a number of votes using a combination of public relations and government relations
- We won in BC because BC retailers stepped up to the plate about 15 years ago and assumed extended producer responsibility for their bags
- They had put in place a voluntary, province-wide in-store take-back-to-retail program that involves almost all of the province's major retailers and manages to recover over 30% of the bags distributed through these stores

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

Our strategy overall has been three pronged and it worked perfectly in BC. We are publicly proactive demonstrating industry leadership.

1. educate the public and debunk the disinformation of environmentalists/municipal councillors using the media and engaging opponents very publicly
2. use government relations specialists with special political ties to the government in power as needed to influence any pending decisions
3. bring allies to the table with lots of clout – in BC, it was Retail BC and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and Recycle BC

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

Then Leaf Rapids, Manitoba happened this April.

- This was a watershed moment.
- We had not only been holding our own but winning the battle until Leaf Rapids announced its ban on the bags
- This small mining community in Northern Manitoba (population 538) has a problem with bears pilfering its open pit dump each spring
- A landfill control situation with bags blowing around and getting caught against the fence
- Initially called for reusable bags
- Escalated into a ban on plastic bags when a supplier of reusable bags offered 5,000 bags for free
- The result was a patchwork of municipal calls to similar bans across the country; particularly in Ontario.

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- This is the gravest threat so far; primary focus has been Ontario because the provincial government has now become engaged.
- We have countered this threat aggressively with:
 - - a strong response to media stories – placement of opeds, letters to the editor and discussions with editors and reporters on the facts
 - - effective 3R's messaging promoting “Say yes to reuse and recycling” campaigns across the province of Ontario
 - - working with individual municipalities to put in place municipal programs to mobilize residents to use the bags wisely – working the grassroots and building allies
 - - a national direct emailing to each councillor in the country explaining to them “Why bans and bag taxes don't work”
 - - an education message on why bans don't work
 - citing international experience is persuasive with key decision makers

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- Again, we have been winning the battle but every day brings a new challenge
- Ontario is an interesting case study
- An election is looming in October
- Focus on announcements regarding the environment
- MOE as facilitator among government, retailers and plastic industry
- MOE issued draft letter of intent calling for
 - Bag usage reduction thru promotion of reusable bags and cashier/customer training
 - Mandatory in-store collection
 - Recycled content (% to be determined)
 - Public education regarding proper bag usage and recycling

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

- Final solution evolving as we meet
- Will include
 - Emphasis on bag reduction
 - targets

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

Key Lessons

- We have a good product and it makes good environmental sense, Wal-Mart example
- Public like our bags and don't want to give them up
- Public would recycle if given the proper opportunity
- Must focus the debate on fact and science, not politics
- Many policy decisions are being made without understanding of the consequences
- In some cases (Ontario), it is policy on the fly i.e. political expediency to make a decision now
- Decisions in the Canadian context driven by municipal goal to divert material from landfill

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

Future Actions

- Must continue with education and myth-busting “set the record straight” program
- Continue to fight in the court of public opinion
- Proactive public relations has tended to work softening up the political climate and putting all players on notice
- Running “Say yes to reuse and recycling” campaigns at the community level and showing municipalities
- Create political allies and bring substantive solutions to the table

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

Future Actions

- The use of allies, independent third parties, to support our position and to advocate on our behalf is a winning strategy
- Tell of the successes i.e. participation in return to retail – Loeb/United way example
- Continue to respect the intelligence and power of the consumer
- Focus on grassroots solutions – empowering people to act using the 3 R's

Canadian Plastics Industry Association

In Defence of Plastic Shopping Bags

Future Actions

- The media can be helpful, if given the facts
- Educate, educate, educate and communicate with all stakeholders
- Not an easy process but with discussion and leadership we can influence the debate and obtain a result that is best for the environment