



## **PLASTIC BAGS POLICY**

### **Policy Statement**

**It is the policy of the Virginia Recycling Association (VRA) to support legislation that would give local municipalities authority to impose, by ordinance, a ban or tax on certain disposable plastic bags.**

### **Reason for Policy**

Plastic bags are a major source of litter and are reportedly one of the biggest contamination items in the single-stream recycling from Material Recovery Facilities (MRF).

### **Who is/will be affected**

Members, Public, Government, Suppliers, Manufacturers, Distributors, Retailers, Recycling and Solid Waste Industries, Farmers

### **Supporting Information**

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, Americans use 10 billion plastic bags per year, with the average family bringing home 1,500 bags a year. Plastic bags, on average, are used about 12 minutes and only 1% of the bags are recycled. Plastic bags become a litter issue and are a problem for Virginia farmers because they degrade the soil and become entangled in their crops. The Clean Virginia Waterways of Longwood University found that plastic bags are the 4<sup>th</sup> most common marine debris found in Virginia, making up nearly 8% of all marine debris. Furthermore, one of the biggest contaminants in the single-stream recycling reported by MRFs are plastic bags, wrap, and film. On a daily basis, these items clog machinery that is used to process recyclable materials resulting in operational problems, facility shutdowns, and safety hazard to employees. Municipalities often pay the cost of the plastic bags which are classified as a contaminant or residue in the recycling.

The Virginia General Assembly has considered numerous legislations to tax and or prohibit the use of plastic bags at grocery stores and other businesses to reduce the occurrence of plastic bags in the environment. Nationally, from 2017 to 2018, approximately 73 bills were introduced in state houses regarding the use of plastic bags in retail settings. In 2009, DC government passed the “Bag Law” requiring District businesses that sell food or alcohol charge a \$0.05 for each paper and plastic bag distributed with any purchase, with certain exemptions. The Alice Ferguson Foundation, which monitors trash in District waterways, reported a 72% reduction in number of bags found during its stream clean-up events after the District implemented the bag fee<sup>1</sup>.

Currently, there are 977 grocery stores and retail locations across the Commonwealth that collect plastic bag, wrap, and film for recycling<sup>2</sup>. The VRA fully supports the plastic film recycling industry and retailers who provide plastic bag recycling for consumers as there would still be various forms of plastic bags and film that would not be covered under this policy.

## **Definitions**

### **Plastic Bags**

Disposable plastic bag provided to consumers by retailers in grocery stores, convenience stores, and drug stores. The plastic bag policy would not apply to:

- Durable plastic bags, with handles designed for multiple reuse;
- Plastic bags used to carry ice cream, meat, fish, poultry, leftover restaurant food, newspapers, or dry cleaning;
- Plastic and paper bags used to carry alcoholic beverages or prescription drugs; and
- Multiple plastic bags sold in packages and intended for use as garbage, pet waste, or leaf removal bags.

### **Recyclable Material**

Raw or processed material that can be recovered from a waste stream and converted into new materials.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://fergusonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/DC\\_Plastic-Bag-reduction\\_OnePager\\_5-11-15-Final.pdf](http://fergusonfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/DC_Plastic-Bag-reduction_OnePager_5-11-15-Final.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.plasticfilmrecycling.org](http://www.plasticfilmrecycling.org)

**Solid Waste**

Solid waste also called Municipal Solid Waste is unwanted items that are discarded because they have served their purpose and no longer useful.

**Recycling Contamination**

Refers to the process of rendering a recyclable material unfit for use. of nonconforming materials. This occurs when incorrect items or materials are put into the collection system or when the right items are prepared incorrectly

**Feedstock**

Refers to the use of recyclable materials as a source for the development of new materials. This would include chemical and industrial processing that breaks down the recyclable material through liquefaction, smelting, crushing, and shredding.