

Baton Rouge Progressive Network

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Press Release

Coalition Launches Initiative to Reduce Grocery Bag Waste

BATON ROUGE, August 3, 2011 -- The Baton Rouge Progressive Network has teamed up with LSU's Environmental Conservation Organization (ECO) and local sustainability group, EcoPods, to take a crack at reducing the use of disposable grocery bags. The coalition's research finds Americans discard approximately 100 billion plastic grocery bags every year. Nationally, only about 2% of that number gets recycled. Additionally, each year plastic bags floating in the world's oceans kill millions of birds. An estimated 100,000 sea turtles and other marine mammals (like jellyfish and squid) mistake the bags for food, causing them to die from ingesting them. Americans are using an estimated 10 billion paper bags annually.

In light of this emerging progressive reality, EcoPods and ECO, along with the Baton Rouge Progressive Network, decided to engage in an education campaign asking Baton Rouge consumers to consider whether they really need a bag at all; or else to bring their own reusable fabric bags from home.

Another component of this initiative is to inform retail stores and consumers about laws regarding grocery bags used for alcohol purchases. Many local grocery, convenience and liquor store clerks routinely, and incorrectly, tell customers they are required to have a bag for purchases of alcoholic beverages. As a first step in the bag awareness campaign, this organizational partnership obtained an opinion letter* from the East Baton Rouge Parish Attorney's office stating unambiguously no such ordinance exists.

The campaign involves sending copies of this letter to various retail chains requesting they brief employees of the following: if patrons wish to use the built-in handle of their six-pack or liter "handle" of alcohol, rather than a superfluous bag, to transport their purchase out of the store, they are well within their rights to do so. Baton Rougians should think twice about taking a plastic bag for any items they could carry by hand, and are encouraged to bring their own reusable bags for items they can't. The goal is to eliminate the myth of any law requiring alcohol to be placed in a bag at the point of sale. It's a simple way for customers to do their part to help reduce the waste of thousands of bags in Baton Rouge every single day. It may be a modest start, but collectively, it adds up to a shot at reducing 300,000 tons of unnecessary and easily avoidable landfill waste!

There are many examples around the country of similar initiatives taking root. For example, Washington, D.C. has begun requiring a nickel fee for each disposable grocery bag. Several other municipalities have either outlawed plastic grocery bags altogether or are presently considering legislation to do so; other proposed options are to tax plastic bags in order to reduce use. Several progressive cities have already outlawed the use of plastic bags in large grocery stores, such as San Francisco, Oakland, Ca., Malibu, Ca., Palo Alto, Ca., and Fairfax, Va.

*Opinion Letter available to press upon request or at brprogress.net

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E.C.O. at LSU
EcoPods