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There are many different contributors to the degradation and depletion of the resources that sustain all life on earth. Among these contributors, many also take part in polluting ecosystems around the world. The issues resulting from many sources include, just to name a few: that of air pollution, water pollution, overpopulation, overconsumption, water conservation, waste reduction, and habitat conservation. Among these issues is the extremely high use of plastic bags which are often not recycled, and instead littered.

Originally, plastic grocery bags were introduced in America in 1977, though not many stores started using them until 1985. Before the Society of Plastic Engineers' Newark Section conference of 1985, the polyethylene bags were really only used by Kroger and Safeway. Then, as a result of the conference, companies learned that plastic bags cost 20% less than paper bags. After that, over 75% of stores started using plastic bags (Laskow). From then the use of plastic bags worldwide has skyrocketed, with almost every major and minor store or retailer offering them to customers.

Each year, around one trillion plastic bags are used worldwide. The US alone uses and throws away about 100 billion bags every year. So, in all the world produces close to 32 million tons of waste solely from plastic ("Facts About the Plastic Bag Pandemic"). A big part of the problem is that people often don't recycle their plastic bags and instead litter. When littered,

because plastic bags are so lightweight, they can travel a long way by wind, often ending up polluting our waterways and oceans. There is so much plastic in the ocean currently that an estimated 46,000-1,000,000 plastic fragments floating in every square mile of the world's oceans ("10 Reasons Why").

To cut down on plastic production and pollution, multiple countries have taken steps forward. The most successful country as of yet, is Ireland. Ireland placed a tax on getting plastic bags in stores in the amount equivalent to 33 U.S cents back in 2002. A few weeks after the fee took effect, plastic bag use had cut down by 94%, and has continued to become smaller over the years (Rosenthal). In California, in November of 2016, the California Plastic Bag Referendum will be voted upon to ratify the bill to ban plastic one-use bags made in 2014. Upholding or ratifying this bill could greatly help to cut down on plastic bag production, which will in turn cut down on the plastic waste and plastic litter and pollution ("California Plastic").

The plastic bag litter and pollution has many negative impacts on the environment's health. For one, many petroleum-based bags don't truly break down and degrade, but instead break up into thousands of tiny pieces that float around and end up consumed by many animals that often mistake them for food. The consumed plastic can then congest the digestive tract which can lead to health problems in addition to entangling and suffocating animals in larger pieces ("10 Reasons Why"). If the plastic problem is left unattended, it could grow greatly over the years. With the high population growth, both use and production of plastic bags will grow, causing the resulting pollution to rise exponentially over the next fifty years.

To solve the problem of plastic bag waste, we should take steps similar to either Ireland, or California. If we either put a high price tax on it, or simply ban it, customers will look away

from getting one-use plastic bags, and look more towards using reusable bags. In both situations, it would be likely that with the lack of use, manufacturers would also stop the production and instead switch to working on producing thicker, multi-use, recycled plastic bags. As of now, only California and Hawaii have bans on plastic bags, and to make a bigger impact, the U.S. needs to implement a ban across all states.

Many sites and blogs discuss how plastic bags should not be banned. In their arguments they discuss how plastic bags can be recycled and reused so we should ban the bag. And while this is true, it doesn't really outway prevention. The reason is this: only about 1-5% of plastic bags that are 'recycled' are actually recycled, as many recycling facilities don't have the capacity to recycle plastic bags, so they don't accept them. From there, much plastic bag waste is simply sent over to developing countries where it is often unknown if it is actually sorted and recycled, or if it ends up in a dump pile or landfill. The other problem with having plastic bags, is simply that americans are lazy, and litter a lot, so why manufacture billions of nonbiodegradable plastic bags that can travel easily around and pollute the environment.

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