

Where are Plastic Bags Banned Around the World?

A New Study on Plastic Bag Bans

Plastic bags are indisputably bad for the environment.

The average bag you pick up at the grocery store, or carry your takeout in, has a lifespan of about 12 minutes. When discarded, they clog sewage and storm drains, entangle and kill an estimated **100,000 marine mammals** every year, and degenerate into toxic microplastics that fester in our oceans and landfills for up to 1,000 years.

Despite this, shoppers collectively use around 500 billion single-use plastic bags every year. That's 150 bags per person, per year, for every single person on Earth — or enough to circle the globe 4,200 times.

Luckily, we're starting to see communities around the U.S., and the world, mobilize to reduce waste by banning, taxing, or otherwise limiting the use of these plastic bags.

ReuseThisBag.com wanted to take a big-picture look at where legislation has been passed, and what its effects have been. Which cities in the US are leading the way for plastic bag bans? Internationally, which countries have made the most significant push?

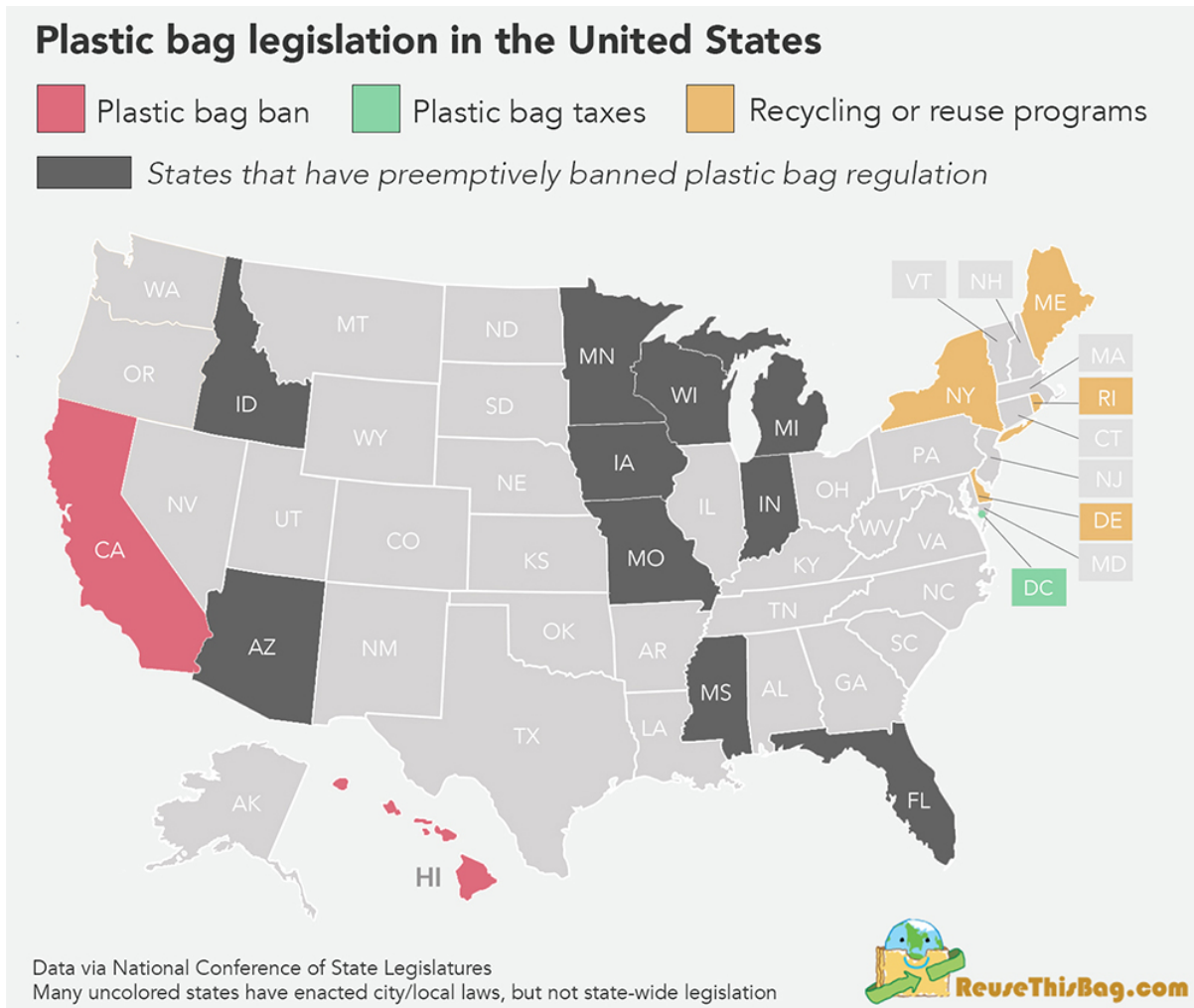
Summary of Key Takeaways

- In the U.S., only 2 states (CA and HI) have banned plastic bags on a statewide level
- 4 U.S. states (DE, ME, RI, NY) have mandatory recycling or reuse programs in place
- 10 U.S. states (AZ, FL, IA, ID, IN, MI, MN, MO, MS, WI) have places preemptive bans on banning plastic bags.
- ~200 U.S. municipalities have banned or taxed plastic bags; outcomes have been largely positive, including:
 - San Jose, CA: Reduction of plastic bags in storm drains (89%), rivers (60%), and residential areas (59%); average # of bags per person reduced from 3 to 0.3.
 - San Francisco, CA: Savings of up to \$600k per year in plastic processing fees.
 - Seattle, WA: Reduction of plastic bags in both residential (48%) and commercial (76%) waste.
- Globally, plastic bags are banned in 32 countries, 18 of which are in Africa

Plastic bag legislation in the US

Many lists of plastic bag bans exist online — but most are convoluted and hard to understand. In assembling our data, we drew public information from the **National Conference of State Legislators** and a number of state-level, and country-level reports.

Let's start with the United States.



In America, only two states have conclusively banned single-use plastic bags: Hawaii and California.

Though Hawaii's ban came first, it wasn't technically a state-wide ban: all **five Hawaiian islands** (Big Island, Honolulu, Kauai, Maui, and Pala) individually banned plastic bags at various points — the last of which took effect in **2015**. The bans, which aim to fully phase in by 2020, range in definition and severity, but generally still allow for the use of 100% recyclable plastic bags.

California passed a unilateral, state-wide ban in September of 2014, and it went into effect in November of 2016. The law bans single-use plastic bags at all large retailers, and imposed a 10-cent charge for paper bags. Before the law was passed, more than 100 California counties already had various bans in place.

Plastic bag legislation in the United States

State	Legislation Type
California	Ban
Hawaii	Ban
Washington, DC	Tax
Maine	Recycling/reuse programs
New York	Recycling/reuse programs
Rhode Island	Recycling/reuse programs
Delaware	Recycling/reuse programs
Arizona	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Florida	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Idaho	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Indiana	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Iowa	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Michigan	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Minnesota	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Mississippi	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Missouri	Laws against regulating plastic bags
Wisconsin	Laws against regulating plastic bags

Data assembled by ReuseThisBag.com



In 2009, Washington, DC imposed a 5-cent tax on all single-use plastic bags after independent studies found them to be the single largest source of pollution in local waterways — and a number of states (New York, Maine, Rhode Island, Delaware) have put partial taxes or bans into place, but haven't yet made the full leap.

Meanwhile, 10 states — Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, Indiana, Mississippi, Florida, and Wisconsin — have preemptively banned plastic bag bans. In these states, the plastic industry's heavy lobbying paid off.

Do bans actually work?

Since the two statewide bans are relatively new, data on outcomes are still largely unfounded, but we can turn to a few studies run by the more than 200 individual cities and municipalities that have enacted ordinances around the country.

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Over 200 counties and municipalities have enacted ordinances either imposing a fee on plastic bags or banning them outright, including all counties in Hawaii.

In **San Jose, California**, for instance, a ban was put into place in 2012 — and since then, there has been an 89% reduction in plastic bags in storm drains, a 60% reduction in creeks and rivers, and a 59% drop in residential plastic waste.

In nearby San Francisco (ban enacted in 2007), the city has saved a reported \$600,000 per year in plastic processing fees alone.

And in Seattle, where bags were banned 5 years ago, residents have seen in **48% drop** in residential plastic bag waste, and a 76% decline in commercial plastic bag waste. In 2010, there were 262 tons' worth of plastic bags in landfills; by 2014, that dropped to 136 tons.

Where are plastic bags banned around the world?

America is far from the most progressive country when it comes to plastic bag bans internationally.

At least 32 countries around the world have plastic bag bans in place — and nearly half are in Africa, where plastic bags frequently clog drains, leading to increased mosquito swarms (and, as a result, bouts of malaria).



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The bans in these countries range widely in severity, but Kenya's, put into place last year, surely take the cake: anyone "making, selling, or importing" plastic bags could face fines of up to \$19,000, and 4 years in jail.

In China, plastic bag waste was so bad that it led to the coining of the term "white pollution." A full ban was adopted in 2008 — and since then, plastic bag waste has dropped by 60% to 80%, an effective reduction of some 40 billion bags. The country does, however, still face enforcement issues.

And in India, where an estimated 20 cows per day die from plastic ingestion, a ban has been in effect since 2002.

Where are plastic bags banned or taxed around the world?

State	Legislation Type	State	Legislation Type
Bangladesh	Ban	Colombia	Tax
Benin	Ban	Czechia	Tax
Bhutan	Ban	Denmark	Tax
Burundi	Ban	Estonia	Tax
Cameroon	Ban	Greece	Tax
China	Ban	Ireland	Tax
Cote d' Ivoire	Ban	Mozambique	Tax
Eritrea	Ban	Netherands	Tax
France	Ban	Poland	Tax
French Guyana	Ban	Portugal	Tax
Gabon	Ban	Romania	Tax
India	Ban	Slovakia	Tax
Italy	Ban	South Africa	Tax
Kenya	Ban	Sweden	Tax
Macadonia	Ban	Turkey	Tax
Madagascar	Ban	United Kingdom	Tax
Malawi	Ban	Argentina	Partial ban or tax
Mali	Ban	Bolivia	Partial ban or tax
Mauritania	Ban	Brazil	Partial ban or tax
Moldova	Ban	Burma	Partial ban or tax
Morocco	Ban	Chad	Partial ban or tax
Myanmar	Ban	Chile	Partial ban or tax
Nepal	Ban	Ethiopia	Partial ban or tax
Papua New Guinea	Ban	Greenland	Partial ban or tax
Republic of the Congo	Ban	Indonesia	Partial ban or tax
Rwanda	Ban	Japan	Partial ban or tax
Senegal	Ban	Malaysia	Partial ban or tax
Sri Lanka	Ban	Mexico	Partial ban or tax
Taiwan	Ban	Netherlands	Partial ban or tax
Tanzania	Ban	Pakistan	Partial ban or tax
Tunisia	Ban	Philippines	Partial ban or tax
Uganda	Ban	Somolia	Partial ban or tax
Botswana	Tax	Spain	Partial ban or tax
Bulgaria	Tax		

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Some 18 countries also have taxes in place, which have proved to be a viable alternative to a full ban.

In Ireland, a **22c plastic bag tax** has reduced usage by as much as 90%. Portugal has seen a drop in excess of 85%. And since imposing a tax in 2003, Denmark has seen the lowest plastic usage in Europe. Averaging just 4 bags per person, per year.

It's crucial that America, and the rest of the world, follow the lead of countries and states that have taken action against plastic bags.

Globally, as many as 160,000 plastic bags are used every second — and currently, only **1 to 3%** of them are recycled. This simply isn't sustainable behavior.

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The easiest, and most affordable, thing you can do is purchase reusable grocery bags. Today, these bags are made from a wide range of materials (cotton/canvas blends, ripstop, woven rPET), and come in an unlimited number of customizable designs.

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And they last a lot longer than 12 minutes.