

# **POSITION STATEMENT FORM**

(Completed form to be provided to the Legislative Committee)

## **GENERAL SUBJECT AREA -- TITLE OF PROPOSAL:**

REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION FROM PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS

## **PROPOSAL:**

Support legislation to reduce the use of plastic disposable bags. If disposable bags are provided they should be paper with a high recycled content and with a nominal fee/deposit of a nominal amount, such as 5-10 cents. The use of reuseable bags should be encouraged.

## **SOURCE:**

Environmental Quality Advisory Council, July, 2009

## **BACKGROUND:**

Plastic bags do not completely degrade in the environment. They present a real threat to wildlife and aquatic organisms. In the open ocean, plastic bags break up into small pieces that resemble food that fish ingest. While plastic bags may be recycled or disposed of so that they are not released to the environment, many plastic bags end up in fields, streams, lakes, rivers and the oceans. Paper bags are disposable and are expected to pose fewer environmental risks. Paper bags in Fairfax County can be recycled or disposed of as trash, where they would be incinerated. Incinerated bags will release some carbon dioxide, which is less harmful to the atmosphere than methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas. Discarding paper bags after one use is also resource intensive in terms of trees and all of the efforts to harvest trees and manufacture the paper.

The goal should be to encourage the use of reusable bags. In order to discourage the use of single use throw away bags, a nominal deposit/fee should be required for each bag.

In the 2009 legislative session, the following three bills were introduced that addressed paper and/or plastic bags:

- House Bill 2010 would have established a \$0.05 per bag fee for each disposable paper or plastic bag provided to consumers in grocery stores, convenience stores and grocery stores. Durable plastic bags that have handles, are at least 2.25 mm thick, and are designed for multiple reuse would be exempted from the fee, as would be bags used to package ice cream, meat, fish or poultry
- Senate Bill 873 would have banned the use of plastic carryout bags by retailers at the point of sale, with the exception of durable plastic bags with handles that are at least 2.25 mm thick and that are designed for multiple reuse.
- House Bill 1814 was identical to Senate Bill 873.

Each of the three bills was left in the committee to which it was referred.

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors' 2009 General Assembly Final Legislative Report does not indicate that the Board of Supervisors took a position on any of these bills.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*(Do not fill out-- This will be indicated by the Legislative Director and County Executive)*

**POSSIBLE SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION BY ORGANIZATIONS:**

*(List any organizations or groups, if any, which might be in favor of or against the proposed position)*

Support from environmental and civic organizations is expected for bills that encourage the reuse of bags, ban plastic bags or require deposits for disposable bags. We expect at least some retail establishments and consumer groups may oppose such legislation.

**STAFF CONTACT PERSON(S):**

*(Provide name and phone number of County staff person(s) best able to provide any additional research or necessary information)*

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