

Are reusable bags really for the environment, or just a money-grab?

By ACSH Staff — July 31, 2014



New York City is now considering putting a ten-cent fee on each

plastic bag used by customers, previously provided free of charge. Although this was initially suggested during Bloomberg's term, opposition prevented its consideration. However, the de Blasio administration is very much in favor of this proposal.

What this proposal fails to take into account is the public health of consumers, as Brad Gerstman, lawyer, lobbyist and co-founder of the New York Association of Grocery Stores, [points out](#) ^[1] in an op-ed appearing today in *The New York Post*. The bag tax is meant to encourage consumers to instead use reusable bags, ostensibly for the benefit of the environment. However, Gerstman cites [a study](#) ^[2] done by researchers at the University of Arizona which found that over 99 percent of the reusable bags they tested harbored some form of bacteria, including *E. coli*. Furthermore, the study also found that only three percent of shoppers who used reusable bags washed them. And three quarters of people who used reusable bags failed to use separate bags for meat and vegetables. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Reusable bags, if not properly washed between uses, create the potential for cross-contamination of foods.

Furthermore, the City cannot claim that this tax would be an effort to protect the environment, because as Gerstman points out, it takes less energy to make plastic bags than the canvas ones that the reusers usually push. And consumers often reuse plastic bags for other purposes.

ACSH's Ariel Savransky adds, From a public health perspective, if you're going to consider using reusable bags, make sure you wash them after using and use separate bags for meat and vegetables. Ultimately, this seems like a money grabber for the city and a public health threat for consumers.

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Links

[1] <http://nypost.com/2014/07/31/the-city-councils-plan-to-promote-e-coli/>

[2] <http://www.chicagotribune.com/health/sns-green-bacteria-in-shopping-bags,0,4837500.story>