



Your Environment

A collaborative information resource for the Muskegon County Community

Second Quarter - 2015

The June 9, 2015 Quarterly MCECC meeting presentation was provided by Sara Damm, Muskegon County Sustainability Coordinator, in partnership with Muskegon County Board of Commissioners Chairman Terry Sabo, to discuss the problems caused by plastic bag litter. They are working to bring awareness of this issue to the community, and also hopefully some solutions. Commissioner Sabo said it is time to stir the pot and see what happens.

Plastic bags are typically made from a petroleum product called polyethylene, which is not biodegradable, and does not decompose readily. Plastic bags are photo-degradable, which means they break into small parts. These parts contaminate the soil and water, and are consumed by wildlife, and inevitably humans. Plastic bags can be recycled into other plastic products but they do not go away; there is no "away." The county spends roughly \$25,000 each year to clean up trash that has escaped the landfill as part of licensing requirements. 90% of the trash picked up is plastic bag litter. Plastic bags are the 4th most common trash picked up on the nation's shorelines and beaches (cigarettes and tobacco product litter are #1).

Approximately 200 communities across the USA have ordinances pertaining to plastic bags. These are usually shoreline communities attempting to mitigate environmental harm. No Michigan community has a regulation. Muskegon, as a shoreline community trying to improve its image, address an eyesore and prevent the damage is looking to the communities with ordinances who are tackling their problem of plastic bag trash.

A phased or staged roll-out strategy might look something like:

Awareness campaign -> community involvement -> promote reusable bags thru logo and advertising -> free reusable bag program -> low cost reusable bags -> ban plastic bags -> charge for paper bags.

The MCECC passed a motion to support the efforts of the Muskegon County Commissioners to address the problem of plastic bag trash. Is convenience more important than conservation?

Good Websites Good Information

EPA CARE Program
www.epa.gov/care

EPA Lead Safety
www.epa.gov/lead

E-Waste Recycling
www.reconnectpartnership.com

County-wide Health Concerns
www.muskegonhealth.net

Link from National Wildlife
Federation

GARDENER'S GUIDE TO
GLOBAL WARMING
Challenges and Solutions:
[www.nwf.org/gardenersguide/
Gardeners_Guide.pdf](http://www.nwf.org/gardenersguide/Gardeners_Guide.pdf)