

OPINION



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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Founded in 1873

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OUR VIEW

Banning plastic bags makes great sense

Here's an idea whose time is now

Plastic bags are lightweight, handy and easily thrown away after use.

Just about everyone will have used those disposable bags from the grocery store to carry their foodstuffs home, and occasionally a second or third use to temporarily store or transport some reasonably light item — then tossed them away when they split.

We can be cured of this common practice by taking a long, careful look at a photograph of a dead seabird or other creature whose beak or stomach has been clogged with this symbol of human convenience.

The struggle of losing this “convenience” vs. what should be our planet-wide commitment to protecting the environment seems an obvious choice.

It is time to ban or significantly restrict single-use plastic bags in groceries and other stores.

It's a comparatively small action, but a reasonable one.

Critics may see this as an infringement on businesses, and a lessening of convenience in our consumer society. Paper bags aren't as versatile, useless when wet, and just plain awkward when their handles break off. Industry spokesmen say they may cost businesses more than three times as much to stock at their cash registers. But they are biodegradable and often manufactured from recycled paper.

The city of Portland has been a pioneer in this campaign and its website contains excellent tips on specific strategies to help — as well as a well-argued case for why its leaders have taken the stance.

“Plastic bags are extremely lightweight and can act like balloons blowing out of garbage trucks and landfills,” city leaders say. “These flyaway bags litter our parks and



A plastic bag floats in a school of fish.

Bahamas Reef Environment Education Foundation

trees, enter storm drains and can eventually end up in rivers and oceans where they break into small, toxic pieces.

“Plastics have found their way into all five of the world's major ocean current systems and are one of the most common types of litter found in Portland's rivers and on Oregon's beaches. Sea animals often mistake plastic particles for food, causing harm to the animals and potentially affecting the seafood we eat.”

State considering ban

North Coast leaders talked about a possible ban last year, but the idea went nowhere. Outgoing Astoria Mayor Arline LaMear said last month that she wishes she'd pushed harder on the issue.

“It always just disturbs me when I drive someplace and I see them on our roads, trees and ocean,” LaMear said in August. “I'm aware some people like these plastic bags

for convenience, but we hope to show how much damage it does to the environment.”

More than a dozen other cities in Oregon have taken action, including the tiny community of Silverton — a place smaller than Astoria. That has prompted discussions in Salem about taking a statewide approach. The Legislature is now considering a tax on plastic bags and a ban on single-use plastic straws.

We think it's appropriate for the state to step in, though the proposal doesn't go far enough.

It's plain silly for people to travel from city to city not knowing what regulations exist in different communities. It's also unfair for small merchants in one town to make the switch when their big-box competitors a few miles down the road hand out bags by the ton.

All that needs to happen is for people to buy and then re-use sturdy cloth bags of their own —

keep them in the car, or fold them up and carry them if they are walking to the store. When large grocery stores were ordered to charge for plastic bags in Great Britain in 2015, their use diminished significantly as residents returned to their 1950s practice of carrying their own shopping bags.

The government's environmental minister, Therese Coffey, hailed the program as a success less than a year later when announcing significantly diminished number of bags in circulation. “It will mean our precious marine life is safer, our communities are cleaner and future generations won't be saddled with mountains of plastic taking hundreds of years to break down in landfill sites,” she told The Guardian newspaper.

That success led to broader discussions about straws and polystyrene in Britain and other western nations. Australia, for example, is poised to enact tighter rules on disposables in most regions late this year.

For the past two or more decades, we have exhorted North Coast residents to “think globally, act locally.” That phrase was dreamed up as the 1960s ended and made popular in the 1970s. Since then, it's been an easy philosophy that anyone can embrace. It just makes sense.

Disposable grocery bags are among the foremost symbols that we have become an out-of-control, throwaway society.

Cloth bags are usually easier and more comfortable to carry, and can be used over and over. Their additional bulk is minimal, and worth the effort.

Here's a step we can take to help the environment — and signal our shared belief in the need to do so.

It is an idea whose time has come.

Water under the bridge



Compiled by Bob Duke

From the pages of Astoria's daily newspapers

10 years ago this week — 2009

Among those from the North Coast traveling to President Barack Obama's inauguration will be Matt Winters, editor of the Chinook Observer in Long Beach, Wash., sister paper to The Daily Astorian.

Before he departed, he was asked about his excitement level for the trip.

“Getting to tell my 11-year-old she had a ticket to see this wildly historic event was one of the highlights of my life,” Winters said. “Being there to hear this good man speak the sacred words of the oath of office will reverberate through her life.”

The logistics of going have been absolutely awful, but evaporate into nothing compared to the privilege and potency of the experience.”

As a former smoker, Janine Pickering can see both sides of Oregon's expanded Smokefree Workplace Law, which took effect Jan. 1.

The Labor Temple bartender said the law has probably cut down on her bar's business and makes more work for her because she has to keep track of customers entering and leaving the bar with drinks in-hand.

The law bans smoking in taverns, among other places, and requires smokers to stand 10 feet from the entrances, exits, open windows and ventilation intakes.

After seven happy boom years, the Pacific sardine fishery appears to be going bust.

Coming off a record year in 2007, the coastwide catch limit for sardines dropped from 152,654 metric tons to

80,184 last year, cutting fishing seasons extremely short and knocking down income for nearly a dozen processors and two dozen fishing boats in the Columbia River area.

Now it looks like 2009 will be even worse, with only 59,232 metric tons of sardines available for harvest.

50 years ago — 1969

A cautious optimism seems to be the general attitude on the part of Clatsop County leaders toward the area economy in the new year.

“The year 1969 looks very bright,” said Cannon Beach Mayor Gerald Gower.

Most officials interviewed recently felt that construction and general activity in 1968 gave hope for a healthy 1969.

Activities of Astoria Plywood Corp. will not be curtailed because of a strike by members of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International union, a company spokesman said Monday.

Several plants in the southern part of the state reportedly were unable to operate due to the strike, which shut off supplies of natural gas.

“We generate our own steam right here in the plant,” the spokesman said, “and have no need for outside fuel.”

Widespread closure of Clatsop County schools followed Wednesday in the wake of a storm which dumped tons of snow on highways and outlying roads.

The Port of Astoria was honored this week as the site of a coming-out party for a new Japanese log and lumber ship, the Seine Maru, now on its maiden voyage.

The 505-foot-long vessel put in Saturday at Astoria for logs after a two-week trip from Hiroshima. She's to depart this week for Vancouver, B.C., and then sail for Shimizu, Japan.

Bill Hoag, owner and operator of the Astoria city transit system, said Thursday he's just about ready to ask the city if it wants to take over the system, which he's operated for five years.

Hoag, 60, said the transit system's insurance and tax

payments and cost of parts had risen so high that he can't feasibly operate the service much longer. He said he pays \$138 a month insurance on one bus.

75 years ago — 1944

Two medium-sized navy planes operating from the Clatsop airport collided in the air Thursday almost directly over the mouth of the Columbia River, and one pilot parachuted from his spinning plane into the sea, while the other miraculously brought his battered plane safely home.

The flier forced to bail out is still missing.

The streets of Astoria's residential districts will be literally lined with tin Saturday morning as household tin can collections wait for pickup trucks to take them to the railroad gondola which will carry them to a salvage center.

Pre-Pearl Harbor fathers are now being taken from Clatsop County for induction into the armed forces, according to Leif Halsan, of the local selective service office.

Fathers were included in draft lists of the county in “numbers fit to mention” for the first time in the December induction call. Halsan said that the local board has now “really begun” to call fathers whose occupations are considered non-essential.

“The only thing which can at all forestall widespread drafting of fathers is a large increase in the enlistment of women in the armed forces,” Halsan said.

Mrs. Merle Chessman, wife of the publisher of the Astorian-Budget, narrowly escaped serious burns and possible death in a freak fire at their home, 526 Grand Avenue, at noon today, according to Wayne Osterby, fire chief.

Mrs. Chessman was applying a cleaning fluid to her kitchen floor, when suddenly the entire floor was enveloped in flames, apparently starting when fumes of the fluid came in contact with a blaze in an incinerator attached to her gas stove.

With a broom Mrs. Chessman attempted to beat out the fire, which was spreading to the floor of the hallway of the home. Unsuccessful, she called the firefighters, who arrived in time to check the blaze before serious damage occurred.