

Dirge for a Plastic Bag?

While the dirge-like proliferating news on the subject of plastic bags isn't exactly a hymn or tune, certainly the negativity surrounding the topic is tending to sound slowly and very solemnly like grief and lamentation for the bag's future—perhaps even our industry. But what surprises me most about this situation is a seemingly lack of proactive objection and response on our industry's part.

This past March, my editorial was headlined:

"Sustainability—Déjà Vu All over Again?" I noted how stories continue to filter to me about new "eco-friendly efforts" that threaten to ban the single-use plastic bag. I asked whether metropolitan governing bodies had forgotten to analyze the life cycle of plastic compared to paper bags. What's more, hadn't we performed this exercise in the past?

Interestingly enough, there was only one response to that editorial. However, I wouldn't doubt it probably reflects the opinions of a many readers. Unfortunately, by this person's request, I cannot share the identity of the

writer, but the comments are certainly worth sharing:

Once again you have hit the nail on the head regarding the decades-long march toward "sustainability," environmentally friendly, eco-responsive, or whatever other name this has been called for the last 20 (maybe 40 years). One wonders if anyone really cares once the initial publicity has been obtained by the person vocalizing their undying support for the latest "Zeitgeist" movement. As you indicated, we investigated 50-year-old landfills, tried to ban plastic bags, wanted to outlaw aluminum cans, tried to outlaw the six-pack plastic holders, etc., etc., etc.

Today's efforts sometimes seem just like more of the same old thing. I was recently at a meeting including the CEO of a major company. He was pushing for the industry to embrace the "green" movement and wanted everyone to measure their carbon footprint,

redesign all the equipment to be "green friendly," and get "certified" so everyone will know what a great job they're doing to be the friendliest guy in town. After standing on this soapbox for at least a couple of hours, then during a coffee break he proudly told some of us about the new Mercedes that he had just order that would have a 450-hp engine; but that it was okay because it would be a "hybrid." Enough already!!!!

I'm certainly in favor of making attempts to clean up the environment and make sure that we take all the steps necessary to reduce those items, elements, and other things that are deemed to be detrimental to man and beast, but believe we need to be reasonable and logical in our efforts and make meaningful advances, not just a sound-bite for instant gratification and then continue on our merry way.—Anonymous

Since my March column, I've received still more announcements about pending or passed legislation on banning plastic bags: most recently Los Angeles, CA; San Francisco, CA; Malibu, CA; and China (as in the entire country). I'm sure there are more.

In fairness, there have been some rebuttals to these insane knee-jerk reactions as Michael Fisher of Fisher Container, Buffalo Grove, IL, describes these bans. While the plastic bag has become the "urban tumbleweed of our nation," says Fisher, the alternative paper bag promotes deforestation, the introduction of dioxins and poisons to our ground and waterways, and use of 70% more energy than plastic bags to produce, recycle, and ship. "There's a great concern for going green, and it's about time. But we've all lost sight of what we want to do for the environment." As a manufacturer of both paper and plastic bags, Fisher realistically anticipates the unlikely commitment of families to using woven bags on their shopping trips and the greater likelihood of their opting for non-biodegradable paper, which consumes more energy to produce, ship, and recycle. What would any true tree hugger accomplish with this choice?

The answer, Fisher says, (and I agree) lies in "all communities aggressively pursuing recycling programs. Banning is not a solution, but it does make people feel good that they've done something, even though they don't understand. Legislative decisions must be based on intelligence, not knee-jerk reactions. It's not about ending this or that; it's about changing our lifestyle!"

My friends call me...

yo

PFFC



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