

Letter Sent to the 54 NJ Towns with Plastic Bag Ordinances already on the Books

March 31, 2020

Sent Via email

Dear Mayor,

Thank you for all that you are doing to keep your residents safe in these unprecedented times. We write to you today on an issue related to our current extraordinary circumstances.

As one of 54 towns in NJ with a plastic bag law, you likely received a letter from the New Jersey Food Council (NJFC) regarding Governor Murphy's Executive Orders 103 and 104 and your local plastic bag law. The NJFC letter suggests that the Governor's Executive Orders require you to stop enforcing your plastic bag law.

There is nothing in these Executive Orders that suggests you need to stop enforcing your local ordinances. Furthermore, there is no evidence that single use plastic bags are safer or more sanitary than reusable bags. We are concerned that there are organizations trying to use the coronavirus outbreak to block single-use plastic bans here in New Jersey (New York Times: [In Coronavirus, Industry Sees Chance to Undo Plastic Bag Bans](#)). They are also attacking the use of reusable bags, which, based on sound science, we have found to be a specious argument. The Plastic Industry Association and some of their allies like the NJFC have fought these plastic bag bans from the outset and opposed real reusable bags all along. Now, they are deliberately using our health emergency as a cover to try to block these bans. The Borough of Bradley Beach decided not to entertain the request in the NJFC's letter and they left their single-use plastic bag ban law in effect.

The Plastics Association has stated that single-use plastic bags are the most sanitary choice when it comes to consumption and transport of food. However, the coronavirus can easily be spread on plastic bags. According to a [new study](#) published in the New England Journal of Medicine, the virus can live up to three days on plastic. People are practicing social distancing. Workers and customers are wearing gloves at the supermarket. There are so many other surfaces that the virus can be transmitted on as well, whether it is a steel can of soup, the cart handles at the supermarket, or the change from the cash register. By trying to stop plastic ban ordinances, the Plastics Industry Association and their allies are ignoring the voices of the towns who have passed them. They are using a public health emergency as cover to shortchange the environment and the people of New Jersey. NJFC has picked up this misinformation, withdrawn their support for plastic bag bans, and are advocating that towns suspend their ordinances.

Common sense tells us all that those who wash and bring their own bags to the store and then bag their own groceries expose themselves to fewer surfaces touched by others. Whereas, single use plastic bags are touched by store cashiers who touch every item that goes into your bag along with all the items that went into other customers' bags who may or may not be infected with COVID-19.

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It is important to make sure that single-use plastic bag advocates cannot use the COVID-19 public health emergency as an excuse to stop plastic bans in New Jersey. We can have a clean environment and protect supermarket employees at the same time. Stores can allow people to continue to bring their own reusable bags and have shoppers bag their own groceries. Your town has worked hard to ban plastics. People are fed up with plastic pollution filling up their storm drains and threatening their drinking water. The Plastics Association has actively opposed banning plastic bags, and now they are using the health crisis to undo the progress that towns across New Jersey have made.

We urge you to stand with the public and the environment during this important time. We, the undersigned members of the environmental community, urge you and your local stores to continue to employ safety practices as you have in the past including social distancing protocols, fewer touches, and maintaining your local single use bag policies and timelines. We understand these are unprecedented times and the safety of your residents is critical.

We welcome any questions you might have regarding this matter and are here as a resource for you as you navigate this issue. Feel free to contact us by reaching out directly to John Weber, Bradley Beach Council President at JWeber@bradleybeachnj.gov.

Stay healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

John Weber, Bradley Beach Council President*
Judith Enck, President, Beyond Plastics and former EPA Regional Administrator
Amy Goldsmith, NJ State Director, Clean Water Action
Jeff Tittel, Director, NJ Sierra Club
Doug O'Malley, Director, Environment New Jersey
Britta Wenzel, Executive Director, Save Barnegat Bay
Cindy, Zipf, Executive Director, Clean Ocean Action

*for identification purposes only