

## Plastic Politics

Plastics may be convenient, but they sure are politically incorrect. San Francisco recently banned the use of standard plastic bags at large supermarkets and pharmacies because they aren't biodegradable like paper bags are. Plastic bags also, supposedly, generate more pollution. Consumers will now have to use compostable bags that are made of corn or potato starch, or bags made from recycled paper.

As in the case of global warming, though, emotion has once again trumped the facts. Paper bags cost 5 times as much as their plastic counterparts to produce; they are also *bigger* polluters, as they require 4 times the energy to produce and almost 100 times the energy to recycle. Contrary to popular myth, paper bags don't degrade much faster than plastic ones in landfills, as the garbage is compacted--which is why in some landfills you can find well-preserved, decades-old newspapers. Paper bags also take up considerably more space in landfills. But PC vanity reigns unperturbed in San Francisco--and also undoubtedly in the Bay City's imitators.

[Subscribe to Forbes and Save. Click Here.](#)