

**Testimony of Randy Tucker, Legislative Affairs Manager  
In Support of House Bill 2509  
House Committee on Energy and Environment  
February 27, 2019**



Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

Metro is the regional government of the Portland metropolitan area, serving a population of more than 1.5 million. We have major responsibilities for managing the region's solid waste and providing opportunities for recycling and waste reduction. Our services also include the Oregon Zoo, whose mission is to inspire the community to respect animals and take action on behalf of the natural world.

Metro and the Oregon Zoo strongly support a statewide ban on single-use plastic checkout bags. HB 2509 will establish such a ban, thereby reducing the quantity of plastic bags in the waste stream and the environment.

Plastic bags are a significant problem for our recycling programs. When mistakenly mixed with other recyclables, they clog sorting machines at material recovery facilities. Problems associated with plastic bags account for as much as 30% of the overall cost of recycling. Metro has worked for years with solid waste haulers, local governments and recycling facilities to educate households to recycle plastic bags separately from their curbside recycling, but it has been very difficult to get households to change their behavior. We have seen, however, that plastic shopping bag bans are an effective method of reducing the presence of these bags in the waste stream. A waste characterization study in 2015 showed that in the City of Portland, plastic shopping bags are 70% less prevalent in single-family recycling carts than in the rest of our region. The study found an average of 5 plastic bags per sample in the City of Portland as compared with an average of 17 bags per sample in the rest of the region.

From the Oregon Zoo's perspective, the reasoning is simple: plastic bags pollute the environment and create hazards for wildlife on a massive scale. All of us are increasingly aware that a huge quantity of plastic debris generated by humans eventually makes its way to the oceans. This debris – a mix of plastic products including bags, strapping, fishing nets and broken bits from larger products – affects Oregon's native marine wildlife, including whales, seabirds and sea turtles, in multiple ways:

- Animals become entangled in plastic debris, suffer lacerations and infections and sometimes even drown.
- Many seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles have been reported to eat marine debris, including plastics. In some instances, the plastic may pass through the gut without harming the animal, but in other cases it can become lodged in their throats or digestive tracts. This can lead to starvation or malnutrition if the digestive tract is blocked. In addition, debris can accumulate in the gut and give a false sense of fullness,

causing the animal to stop eating and slowly starve to death. Some seabirds even feed plastic debris to their young.

- A recent near-shore seafloor study found debris densities highest near urban areas. At most of the stations sampled, plastic bags accounted for more than 90% of the total debris.
- Plastic bags in the ocean photo-degrade into smaller and smaller bits, which absorb persistent bio-accumulative toxins such as PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) that are then eaten by ocean organisms. These chemicals concentrate as they move up the food chain, poisoning higher-level predators.

The hazards plastic waste pose for wildlife have led the Oregon Zoo to choose to eliminate single-use plastic bags and straws in our shops and concessions.

Metro and the Oregon Zoo believe that by focusing on reducing the sources of plastic pollution, HB 2509 will both advance our regional waste reduction goals and protect the health of wildlife, people and the ecosystems we depend on. We urge you to move it forward.