

In era of coronavirus, banning plastic bags could be lethal

Exclusive: Rebekah Stoeppler explains disease-spreading nightmare of government rule



By **WND Guest Columnist**

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By Rebekah Stoeppler

At Walmart, I was used to seeing a lot of dirty bags customers brought in, but *these* bags were particularly disgusting. Customer service is the No. 1 criterion of my job as a cashier, so instead of declining a particular bag, while the customer loaded the belt, I turned the bag upside down to shake out the animal hair in it. The rain of hair that descended took me by surprise, and I quickly turned the bag upright to not make a bigger mess. Fortunately for me, the customer had enough semi-clean bags that I didn't have to make them bag their own groceries.

This event is one of many I see every day at my work, ever since the new bag law came into play in Oregon. I have to deal with disgusting, marijuana-smelling, disease-spreading, smelling-like-a-ripe-litter-box bags that take up a lot of extra time for both me and the customer, since I have to hang them on the roundabout – unless the customer decides to buy more plastic bags, which also happens a lot. There are quite a few customers who aren't ashamed to tell me, "Don't worry about how many bags I use – I'll just throw them all away and buy more next time!" And I don't discourage it, because it saves me and the customers time when I can just use the bags already on the roundabout.

Outlawing plastic bags is a way to spread diseases; lack of plastic bags ready to go is inconvenient for both cashier and customer; and so far, because of

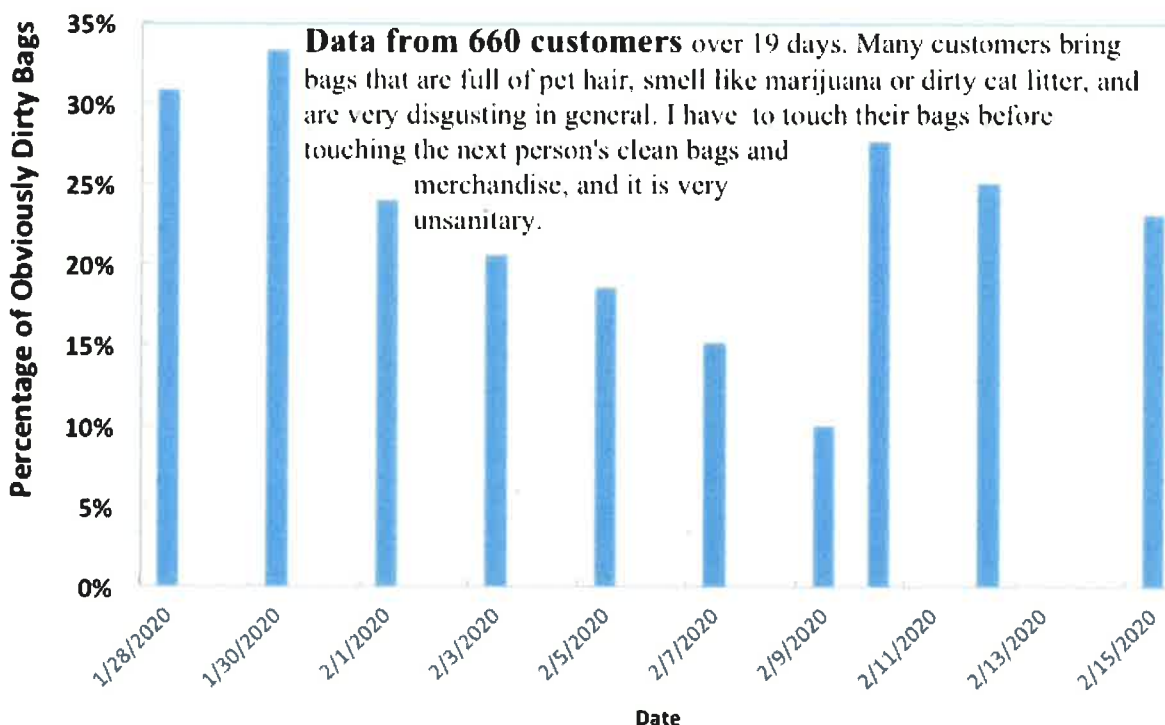
thicker plastic bag replacements, there is four times as much plastic being used than before the ban.

Forcing people to bring their own bags into stores and forcing cashiers to touch those bags from many different customers all day long, and then touching the next customers merchandise, can spread diseases. Even if all the customer bags were 100% clean, and if we all wore gloves, cashiers would still be spreading germs from customer to customer by touching all their bags as well as their groceries.

Given the prevalence of more common diseases like influenza, it is likely that there already have been some avoidable deaths because of the Oregon bag ban. Influenza only stays viable on a person's skin for 15 minutes, but on inanimate objects, this virus can exist from an hour to a few days, depending on variables such as the composition of the surface, temperature and humidity. Bringing bags into stores increases the risk of disease for all customers and store employees.

As a cashier, I noticed the filth and started collecting data on my customers. Twenty-three percent of the customers bringing bags have bags that are conspicuously dirty, and that's just what's obvious to the naked eye! You can't see diseases or know what all the bags have touched. Besides things like bags full of red meat juices or cat hair, one cashier had a drug needle fall out of a customer's bag! I would wear gloves while cashiering, but that doesn't stop the transfer of filth and disease from one customer's bags to the next customer's unprotected produce. By the time break or lunch comes around and I toss the gloves, they have a thick layer of filth and grime on them. It is disgusting even without the disease-spreading factor.

Percentage of Customer Bags Obviously Dirty

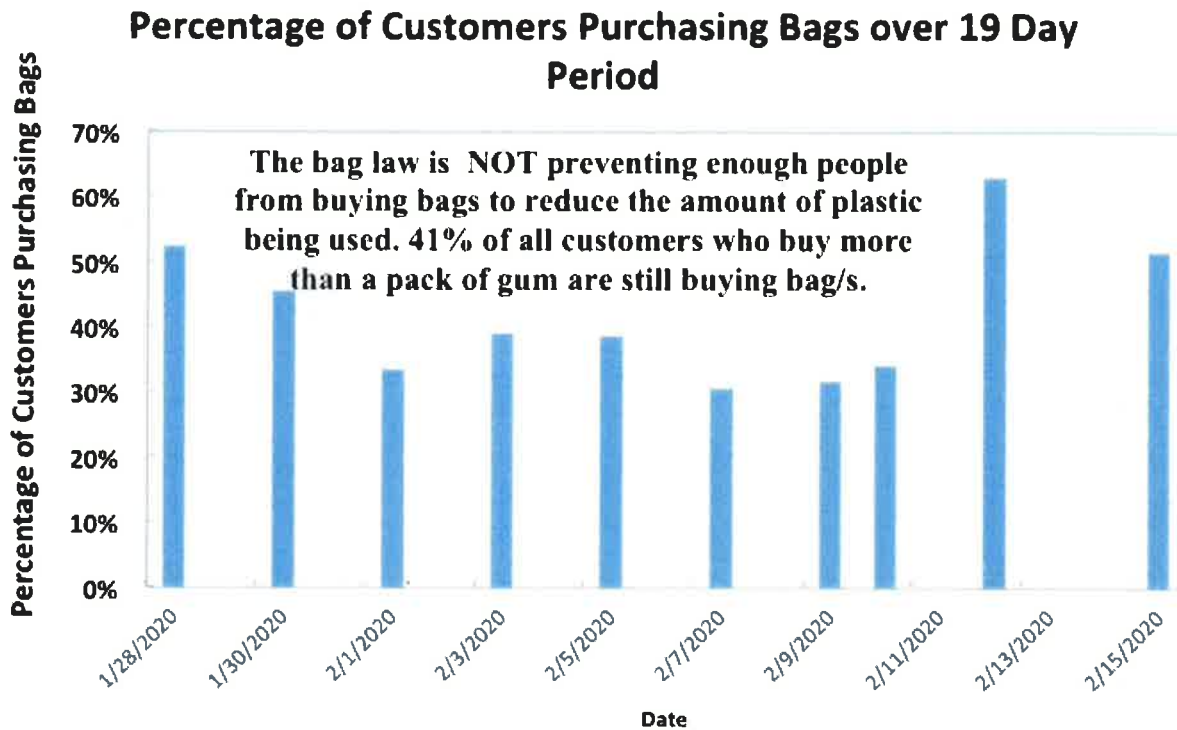


Filth wasn't the only problem. Inconvenience for both cashiers and customers ensued as well as a great deal of time wasted. Many cashiers take more than twice as long to help their customers because they have to deal with the customers' bags, which are frequently dirty and almost always odd sizes that don't fit well on the Walmart roundabout. Customers bring in enormous reusable bags from clothing stores, Costco, or Amazon, and then complain about how heavy the bags are when the groceries are inside.

People have to have disposable bags to buy raw meat and rotisserie chickens to protect their vehicles, and the bag rule is forcing people to either buy a bag to throw away, reuse a bag with raw meat or rotisserie chicken juice, which is very hazardous to health, or ruin their vehicle seats or floor – since the previous convenient, biodegradable and thin plastic bags are no longer available. Now people who can't afford bags, or don't want to comply with the government's regulations, have to carry all their small items from the store to their car looking like shoplifters, and then from their car to their house in many loads rather than being able to use handy bags that were designed for their convenience. I was shopping at Winco last week, and the cashier told me that ever since the bag rule went into place, their hand

shopping baskets have been disappearing by the boatload. He said they've been having to restock them every month.

If you think that you're saving the whales by reducing plastic, I'm sorry to disappoint you – not only are plastic grocery bags a very minor part of the plastic being used, but we are now using more plastic than we were before. (See graph below.)



Before the bag law was put in place, we had thin plastic bags that were convenient for people to carry their groceries in, and they were sanitary. Now we have 9.5 times heavier plastic bags than what we had before! My customers' biggest complaint since the bag rule, besides not voting for such an outrageous law, is their lack of free grocery bags for their trashcans. Now, they have thicker plastic bags, and 65% of my customers who don't bring bags still buy them. About 25% of my customers who buy bags get them "free" from government aid, EBT (food stamps) and WIC, but the rest of them just keep buying the bags and throwing them away.

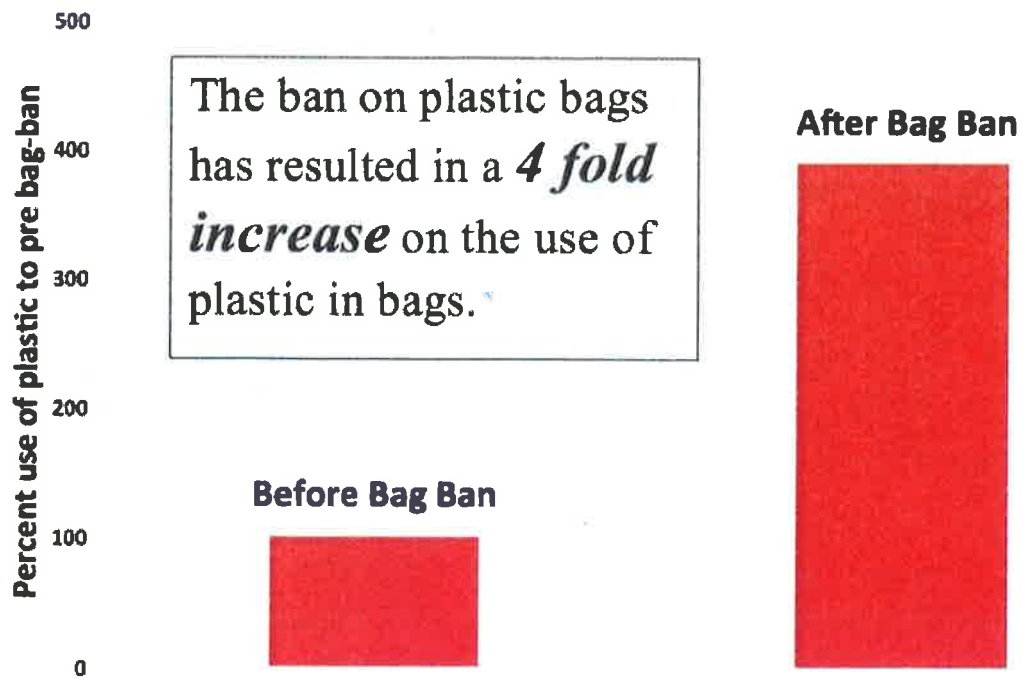
I hear comments from customers such as (angrily), "I didn't vote for this rule," (friendly-like), "They're only 5 cents? To make it more convenient for

you, I'll just buy more even though I brought my own bags," (some making excuses, some apologetically), "I forgot them in the car, so I'll buy more," (gloatingly), "I always throw them out and buy new ones," (disappointed and very fragile little old lady), 'I never shopped at Winco or Costco because they didn't bag my groceries, now I don't know what to do!" (bossy), "I always buy bags because of cross-contamination, don't try to save me money on bags, use another one!" and so on.

Right now, there is a pandemic of the coronavirus disease spreading all over the world, and despite our president's efforts to keep it at bay, this disease has managed to creep into the U.S. There are over 4,000 people who died in less than two months from COVID-19, and the number of cases is continually going up.

Oregon's plastic bag rule (and others like it in other states) has the potential to spread this disease as well as any other disease. Making cashiers and customers go through this inconvenience is completely unnecessary, especially when we're actually using more plastic than we were before! But plastic is not a problem. It's a substance that's very easy to dispose of. It can be burned for electricity, and it is biodegradable. The plastic in the ocean is eaten up by microorganisms, and the only trash that survives is some close to the shore that gets washed up, which is what the leftists use to say that "plastic is destroying the earth."

This is what happens when we have bureaucrats and politicians tell us how we should live our lives. They think they can tell us how to live – why should we have other people telling us that? Our country was founded to be "home of the brave and land of the free," and these know-nothing-never-held-a-job-in-their-lives bureaucrats are forcing us to live their ideal lives instead of just leaving us alone!



Rebekah Stoeppler is a college student and Walmart cashier.