

Banning Plastic Bags from the UBC Campus

Pablo Madrigal

 **@pabl0cean**

madrigal.pablo@ymail.com



Implementing a mandatory elimination of single-use plastic bags from coffeeshops, restaurants, and stores in the UBC campus might seem like a daunting task, but small steps can be implemented so that there is a gradual transition into sustainable bags that are not single use.

100 million plastic bags are used per year in the US

12 million barrels of oil are used to manufacture these bags

1,500 plastic shopping bags are used per year by an average family

80% of plastic pollution in the ocean enters from land

100,000 marine animals are killed by plastic bags annually

500 + years for a plastic bag to degrade

12 minutes is the average time plastic bags are used *

Main Issue

Plastic is a detrimental global issue that needs to be addressed beyond the scope of wishful initiatives that seek to derail attention and resources from causes that have the potential to exercise change. UBC can play a very important role in shifting towards a more sustainable campus by implementing small changes in the way current restaurants, stores and coffeeshops operate its "take home" packaging approach. Over time, these changes will hopefully eliminate plastic bags use from campus stores, coffeeshops, and restaurants. UBC has the possibility to influence the behaviour of students throughout out their education so that

they develop sustainable habits that can stay with them beyond the university years. In addition, this has the possibility to inspire campuses across Canada to follow along in the elimination of plastic bags and foster an environment where sustainability and mitigation of waste disposal are not only studied in lectures but truly embedded in a way of life.



Steps Forward



Students are a particularly impressive demographic because there are ways in which they can mobilize and make change happen. Several initiatives like “mug share” that are intended to reduce plastic use on campus already exist, and grad students have been very vocal in demanding the UBC campus to go plastic free.*

A few small steps that governing bodies can take in reducing plastic waste are:

- Make your own cotton tote bag workshops at the nest at the start of the semester. This can be beneficial on several levels, from creating community between students, to developing new skills, to eliminating the need for students to get plastic bags for the upcoming year. You would only need the fabric and a simple template that gets sewn in less than 5 minutes, resulting in bag like in the picture above.
- Reduce the number of restaurants, coffeeshops, and stores that provide plastic bags by 30% as a starting point, and implementing regulations for them to provide paper bags instead. This number would hopefully increase every year.
- Implement discounts with “bring your own bag” at grocery stores on campus, the UBC library, restaurants, and coffeeshops.

- + **“Make Your Own”** bags workshops at The Nest
- + **Switching** to paper bags
- + **“Bring Your Own Bag Discounts”** offered throughout campus coffeeshops, stores and restaurants

* <http://buildingoperations.ubc.ca/business-units/municipal/waste-management/waste-pick-up/styrofoam/>

* https://www.biologicaldiversity.org/programs/population_and_sustainability/sustainability/plastic_bag_facts.html

* <https://www.change.org/p/ubc-banning-the-use-of-plastic-bags-at-ubc>

* <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/ubc-marine-biologists-reduce-plastics-1.4582537>