

A guide to local plastics ordinances: FAQs

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With 70+ plastics ordinances passed and counting in New Jersey, we are starting to see patterns in terms of the types of opportunities and challenges in front of municipal officials, businesses, communities, and environmental commission (EC) or green team members. With 565 unique municipalities in the State, one strategy does not work for all on plastics education and legislation. Here are some answers to frequently asked questions:

Q Our community is interested in reducing plastic pollution. Where do we start?

A First, get organized.

- Identify a team of five to seven dedicated community members who will champion the effort. Be sure to include elected officials, municipal staff, community and business leaders.
- Think about a program/ordinance that was well received in your town in the past. What worked? Why? Who was involved? How could that process have been made better?
- Join forces. Connect with neighboring communities or join an existing group, such as North Jersey Sustainable Municipal Alliance.

Q We know education is key to changing behavior, but we don't have enough volunteers or time to create materials.

A Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and, fortunately, many ECs and green teams are willing to share materials that they have already developed, from petitions to social media messages. It can save a lot of time when you adapt what another town has already created.

ANJEC aims to keep up with what everyone's doing and to share information via the *ANJEC Report*, the *ANJEC News* and social media. So watch our posts and articles and repost them on your Facebook and Twitter accounts. And be sure to share what you're doing too! Here are some other ways to get the word out.

- Show a movie about plastic pollution in your community, school, or library and discuss what can be done locally. Ask people to take a pledge to live free of single-use plastic and support local plastic pollution ordinances. Two good films are available on loan from ANJEC for public screening: *Plastic Ocean* and *Bag It*.
- Write an opinion piece or letter to the editor of your local newspaper on why it's important to reduce single-use plastics and how residents can get involved and support your efforts. Highlight local businesses that are already taking action and celebrate their stories.

Q How do I educate people that don't need a ban on single-use bags because they already "reuse or recycle" them?

A Impress them with data!

- The average American uses 500 plastic bags per year. Do the math based on your town's population and share that whopping number with skeptics. By the way, less than one percent of plastic bags ever get recycled.
- Teach people how to reuse the plastic bags they can't avoid accumulating, like newspaper bags and packaging for cereal, bread, chips, etc. Get creative with trash!
- Plastic bags floating around in the natural environment and in the recycling stream are costing the town taxpayers money. Discarded bags block storm drains, which can lead to flooding. Plastic bags improperly thrown into recycling create major problems for recycling centers, because they clog the machines and are often contaminated.
- "Free" bags given out by stores are not truly free. There's always a cost that's figured in to the markup for other items.

Q What are some key elements of a successful ordinance?

A An ordinance banning single-use plastic and/or paper bags should have a concise and clear definition of what constitutes a reusable bag. An ordinance banning polystyrene foam (Styrofoam) food service ware should include a concise and clear definition of eligible alternative products. For all ordinances, carefully consider enforcement, data collection and reporting mechanisms.

No need to reinvent the wheel! ANJEC collects plastic pollution ordinances that have been enacted all over the State, so ask us for samples of ordinances passed by towns similar to yours.

Q How long should I expect a successful campaign to take, start-to-finish?

A It depends on the public's interest level. South Orange started their education and ordinance campaign back in 2017, and the plastic bag ordinance finally passed in mid-2019, while the City of Lambertville introduced and passed their comprehensive plastics ordinance within three months.

Q What is the best way to work with small and large commercial retailers to make the transition?

A Interact with them!

- Develop an online or printed survey to gather business owners' feedback and commitment regarding plastics regulations. This will give you a better idea what you're up against.
- Pound the pavement - Meet with as many business owners as possible, especially grocery store managers. Bring talking points and ask them to commit to the success of your new ordinance.
- Organize merchant roundtable meetings - Discuss issues such as cashier training, parking lot signage and offering reusable bags.
- Encourage restaurants and eateries to perform plastic waste audits (see www.productstewardship.us/page/RestaurantGuide).

Q How can we learn from other municipalities who have been through this process?

A Here are some tips from other towns that have passed plastic pollution ordinances:

- Provide a simple, clear explanation of allowed products under the ordinance - Make it as easy as possible for people to conform to the ordinance.
- Have a strong and diverse communication strategy.
- Build support for a local ordinance through petitions.
- Consider enforcement - Who is going to do it?
- Work with neighboring towns - Retailers will feel less threatened that their customers will go to the next town to avoid the fee.

Q Do you have any best practices to share on communication strategy?

A Here are some approaches that have been working well for New Jersey towns:

- Use different platforms to get the message out – the municipal website, social media, schools, tabling at local events, personal connections, etc.
- Match your educational material with the diversity of your community (Spanish, Hindi, Korean, French, etc.).
- Remember brand consistency - Develop a unique name and/or image that will be used consistently. For example, the City of Lambertville's Ditching Disposables initiative has a distinctive logo and tagline that's being used across all communications efforts to engage the community as they transition away from single-use plastics.
- Know your opposition and have talking points ready.
- Educate the community with easy-to-adopt actions.
- Reinforce and celebrate positive changes - Look for bright spots, such as local businesses that are already reducing single-use plastics. Tell their stories through social media, the town website and local press.

Keep in touch!

If you have more questions or you're looking for ordinance samples or other information, please reach out to the ANJEC Resource Center at info@anjec.org.

Resources:

1. Surfrider tool kit (http://public.surfrider.org/RAP/RAP_Toolkit.pdf)
2. Measuring Plastic Bag Laws Effectiveness: (www.plasticbaglaws.org/effectiveness)
3. Hudson River Trash Reduction Toolkit (www.hudsonriver.org/article/stopping-trash-where-it-starts)
4. Rethink Disposable provides more working examples (www.cleanwater.org/campaign/rethink-disposable)