

## TheStar.com | Ontario | No plastic bag ban for Ontario



RON BULL/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Plastic shopping bags are widely used at stores throughout the Greater Toronto Area.

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**ROB FERGUSON**

QUEEN'S PARK BUREAU

**JOHN SPEARS**

CITY HALL BUREAU

Ontario won't follow China's move to reduce pollution by banning plastic shopping bags, Premier Dalton McGuinty said today.

However, during a morning visit to Kitchener, the premier also said the Chinese plan is a reminder that the west should be "rethinking" its reliance on the bags.

"They've borne the regular brunt of criticism from much of the western world," added McGuinty, who has been critical of China's heavy reliance on dirty coal-fired power plants.

"Here's a case where they're demonstrating they can in fact be leaders."

Ontario announced a plan last year to work with industry on reducing plastic bag use, but McGuinty said today that the province isn't considering an outright ban at the moment.

"We're going to continue to move forward on the steps we have in place," he told reporters after announcing an interest-free, \$2.85-million loan to a Kitchener plant that makes airplane landing gear.

McGuinty's comments came after China announced a crackdown on plastic bags, banning production of ultra-thin bags and forbidding its supermarkets and shops from handing out free carriers from June 1.

China's cabinet said in a notice published today that the country uses too many of plastic bags and fails to dispose of them properly, wasting valuable oil and littering the country.

In Toronto, Mayor David Miller noted the city doesn't have as much authority as the Chinese government.

"We don't have the legal ability to ban in-store packaging," Miller told reporters today. "We are looking at the plastic bag issue from our 70 per cent diversion strategy."

"I think Torontonians and businesses, particularly the big supermarkets, are ready to move away from plastic bags," Miller noted.

"Packaging's a big issue," he added. "There's way too much packaging, it's a huge contribution to landfill, and the city has several positions trying to minimize that."

The chair of Toronto's works committee said city councillors and bureaucrats will present a plan this spring on how to reduce the use of plastic shopping bags, as well as other consumer packaging that's added in the store. In addition to bags, that includes items like hot drink cups and dishes that hold take-out food.

Councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker called a year ago for a 90 per cent reduction in the use of plastic shopping bags. As a result, the city struck a working group with retailers and food industry representatives to look at the issue.

Ontarians use about 2.5 billion plastic bags a year, an average of four a week per person.

"We're looking at all types of in-store packaging," De Baeremaeker said in an interview today.

De Baeremaeker explained his committee is considering a range of options, including charging fees for packaging.

"Plastic is a big one; clamshell containers that people take their lasagna and salad out with; coffee cups," he said. "We're looking at all garbage and figuring out how we can get it into a blue box and how we can produce less of it."

"In Ireland, where they introduced a 20 cent per bag levy, they've had a 90 per cent reduction in the use of plastic bags," he said. "I think that's an excellent model. It's one very good option the city is investigating, and may in the end follow.

"We're still looking at the pros and cons of everything. But our goal is to divert 70 per cent of waste from the landfill site. How do you do that? We have to give people the right economic signals."

The Environment and Plastics Industry Council, which is a standing committee of the Canadian Plastics Industry Association, believes that China's ban should not be applied in this country.

Spokesperson Cathy Cirko said in an interview today that "Canada is different from China. We have an infrastructure for recycling here. Shopping bags are recycled and highly recyclable. And we have an effort right across the country on using plastic shopping bags in a very wise manner."

What China should be doing is building an infrastructure on recycling, she said. She said that although a small town in Manitoba, Leaf Rapids, has introduced a ban on plastic bags, "this is not a practical solution for other parts of Canada. That's a town of about 500 people," she said.

Cirko said their polls show that Canadians are recycling plastic bags in growing numbers and the industry stakeholders are working to improve education and recycling efforts.

"What people forget is these bags are practical and they're terribly convenient," she said. "We have to keep on the path we're on."

Cirko said people can log on to [www.myplasticbags.ca](http://www.myplasticbags.ca) to find the closest location where plastic bags can be recycled.