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Are Utah Consumers Interested in using Reusable Bags?

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Abstract

This research will explore the intent and current need for Utah consumers to limit their plastic bag usage. Currently, many cities and state officials are attempting to pass a plastic bag ban. This ban would decrease plastic bags by 71% in just one year.

Methodology

The research conducted was based on an on systematic literature review with the goal to integrate findings and perspectives from many empirical findings.



Background

Approximately 61% of consumers did not use reusable bags on their last grocery trip despite stating they wanted to be environmentally friendly. Their main argument – a busy lifestyle.

Quick facts about plastic bag use:

- 940 million bags are used in Utah yearly. The equivalent of 112,800 tons of oil are used to produce these bags.
- The average family takes home 1,500 bags each year (60 bags in 4 trips).
- Plastic bags are made from petroleum making them non biodegradable. On average it take approximately 1,000 years to break down.
- U.S. landfills only recycle cardboard, metal, and plastics 1 and 2. China used to recycle plastics 3-7 but are no longer accepting them. This means on 1-3% of plastic used is being recycled.

Bag Ban in Practice



Logan City is attempting to limit the number of plastic bags in the Cache County landfill by enacting a city-wide plastic bag ban.

The ban was originally scheduled to start July of 2020 but was postponed to January 1, 2021 due to the Coronavirus. The ban is only set to take place in Logan although city officials have been working with the surrounding cities to limit their waste as well.

The goal is to eliminate all bags or charge a fee for plastic bag use. Customers will be charged a fee of \$0.10 per bag and companies will be charged a handling and disposing fee through the Cache County waste facility.



“If I am going to the grocery store and I want a banana, I pay for the banana. If I want milk, I pay for the milk...it allows consumers to see, I’m just buying a few items, I don’t need a bag.”

-Sarah Bateman, Board President of Utah Recycling Alliance

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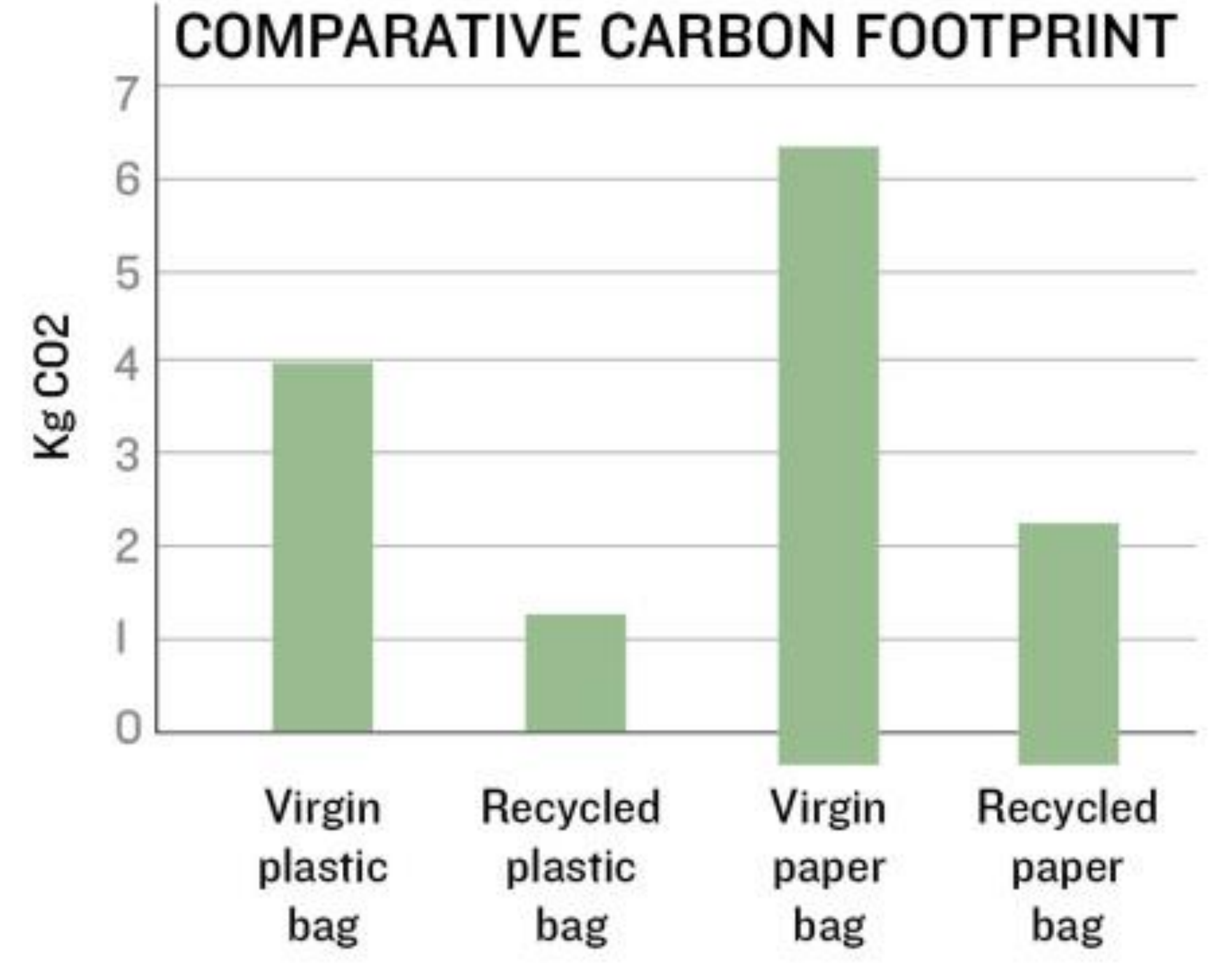
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Finding 1



The switch from paper to plastic bags started in the 1970s when plastic became viewed as more durable. While paper bags are typically seen as more ecofriendly, the lack in durability creates a need to replace them more frequently.

On average, it takes 4X more energy to manufacture paper bags. Approximately 100 million paper bags are used yearly worldwide (this is the equivalent of 14 million trees).

Finding 2

To make reusable bags more appealing to consumers, making bags appear as a fashion statement. This could include reusable logo bags, bags from home material (ex. old t-shirts) or developing fold up bags for easy use.



Conclusion

In conclusion, the intent for Utah consumers to limit plastic bag usage is present. However, the interest in a plastic bag ban is polarized. In the years 2016, 2017, and 2018 Utah Senator Jani Iwamoto attempted to pass a statewide ban for plastic bags but was denied each time. For now, cities like Logan are doing their best to reduce waste in their communities and are encouraging individual consumers to do the same.

