

Municipality of Anchorage Solid Waste Services Memorandum

Date: July 25, 2018

To: Anchorage Assembly

From: Solid Waste Services, Suzanna Caldwell, Recycling Coordinator & Public Information Officer

Re: AO 2018-63 & 63 (S) Disposable Plastic Shopping Bags

Overview:

Solid Waste Services has no data regarding the amount of disposable plastic shopping bags that come into Anchorage Regional Landfill annually. A 2017 Anchorage Regional Landfill waste stream study showed that non-recyclable plastics (including plastic bags, plastic films and containers) made up 5-10 percent of the Anchorage municipal solid waste stream by weight.

However, keeping the landfill free from plastic bag litter is a significant challenge for the department. SWS takes a three-tiered approach to prevent plastic bags and other litter from leaving the landfill:

- **Location:** SWS disposal employees will work selected areas of the landfill's working face dependent on the wind to prevent plastic bags and other litter from blowing away.
- **Movable litter fencing:** Litter fencing is strategically placed around the working face of the landfill to prevent litter escapement.
- **Exterior fencing:** For litter that goes beyond the working face, fencing around the perimeter of the landfill prevents additional litter from exiting its boundaries.

Seasonal laborers are hired in the spring to collect debris around exterior fencing and the rest of the landfill property.

Plastic shopping bags are not the only litter collected on site. Cardboard, paper, plastic, tarps and other plastic films are commonly found as debris in litter fencing.

Plastic bags are only recyclable at limited drop-off locations in Anchorage. They, along with all plastic films, are a problematic contaminant in single-stream curbside recycling collection since they can clog machinery used to separate materials. With recycling commodity prices low due to Chinese import restrictions, removing plastic bags and films from curbside recycling is a top priority for recyclers.

Costs:

Solid Waste Services employs four full-time seasonal laborers whose primary job is picking up litter at the Anchorage Regional Landfill and Central Transfer Station. Costs for those positions are as follows:

2016: \$217,479.06

2017: \$212,714.66

2018 (through June 30): \$125,780.25 (\$88,073.61 at ARL)

SWS has not determined whether any costs savings would be gained by banning disposable plastic shopping bags. Other litter would still need to be picked up at the site regardless of a ban.