



Florida Keys “Got Your Bags?” Program Campaign

Overview: When is the perfect time to adopt best business practices for the environment and your bottom line? *Now* is an ideal time for you to share the knowledge about plastic bags and their negative impacts on the environment with the “**Got Your Bags**” campaign to support the reduction and voluntary elimination of single-use plastic bags in the Florida Keys and reduce the consequences they have on our environment.

Why? Most people today use plastic bags without a second thought. Becoming litter, they are responsible for millions of deaths to fish, reptiles, birds, and mammals annually. Even as trash bags, they end up in landfills where they take between 500 and 1,000 years to disintegrate. Like other plastics, even "bio-degradable" bags only break down to toxic particles. Ingested by small birds, mammals and fish, they work their way up the food chain introducing neurotoxins into the human diet. The bag entanglements on the turtles and birds often result in fatality. It takes 12 million barrels of oil every year to produce plastic bags. On average, each person in the U.S. uses 500 plastic bags every year. Paper bags are not much better; they are expensive to manufacture and ship.

Reusable bags are the only true sustainable answer. Global reduction efforts demonstrate success: Europe's campaign has yielded an 80% to 90% reduction in plastic bag use. China has no plastic shopping bags. The islands of Hawaii are bag free. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and Seattle have eliminated the use of plastic bags. It is time for us to join the movement.

Why the Florida Keys? The environmentally sensitive natural resources of the Florida Keys are also the foundation of our economy. The State of Florida has mandated that no city, municipality, or county shall restrict or ban the use of plastic shopping bags. Successful elimination of this threat to our environment therefore requires increasing awareness through voluntary action on everyone's part.

Enlisting Business Participation! Managers of local businesses are on the front line: at the point of purchase. You can be involved by enacting policies that promote reusable bags and offer your own logo reusable bags. Remind your customers with a “**Got Your Bags?**” tent by the cash register. Train your staff to ask and encourage customers to become a part of “**Got your Bags?**” by reminding them to use reusable bags.

For More Information - If you are interested in more green business training, contact Alicia Betancourt, UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension Agent. Your business can be trained in green office standards, energy efficiency, recycling, and more. If you are interested in signing GLEE's pledge to reduce plastic bag usage or in green business certification, contact GLEE and they will provide you with the necessary information to move forward.

Extension Agent: betancourt-alicia@monroecounty-fl.gov
GLEE Contact: gotyourbags.floridakeys@gmail.com

Website: <http://monroe.ifas.ufl.edu>

Website: www.keysglee.com/index.cfm/gyb



Pay It Forward

Welcome and thanks for your interest!



Our Origins

The “Got Your Bags?” campaign packet is intended to help you understand and implement the program at your business. When you “Take the Pledge” you will receive a packet that includes an overview of the program, a training guide to help employees find ways to promote the use of reusable bags, and a display for the checkout counter.

We ask only one thing: Please use our “Got Your Bags? Florida Keys” logo and remember to display the table tent featuring the label and keeping it noticeable along with your staff cooperation. This will make the campaign more successful.

Also, we are part of a larger program going on in other places:

The original “Got Your Bags?” campaign was a combined effort between the Mariposa County Public Works Department (MCPWD) and the Mariposa County Unified School District in California. They worked together on a pilot stenciling project in local supermarket parking lots. MCPWD staff created the “Got Your Bags?” slogan and logo stencil design. The stencil painting was then incorporated into a lesson plan on recycling for summer school students.

Importance

It is widely accepted that human activities throughout the world have led to the degradation of our natural resources and ultimately the environmental health of our planet. As a result, conservation of the environment has increasingly become one of the most critical priorities in decision-making. There is a widespread realization that we have an obligation to live more conscious of the effects our actions have on the environment in order to help secure a more sustainable future for a healthy world for future generations. There are also benefits to being green in the workplace including the protection of our natural resources, reduction in business costs, promotion of community pride and environmental awareness, serve as a “role model” for the rest of the world, and even Support Florida’s 75% waste reduction by 2025 initiative. The time to move forward is now!

Resources

Materials

Along with the materials we are providing for you, logo-branded products, including the parking lot stencil, window decals, buttons, pins, and similar items are now available for purchase at http://www.recyclingiscool.com/got-your-bags_c_1.html. We are grateful for these materials, recommend them, and encourage you to use them.

Community Support

The Florida Keys program began in Big Pine Key. It was graciously “adopted” by Green Living & Energy Education (GLEE), a nonprofit 501(c) 3 organization in the Keys (see www.keysglee.com/index.cfm/gyb). That allowed the initial project to accept tax deductible cash and

in-kind donations, develop the two-part retail business and residential “Take the Pledge” portions of the program, cover the cost of web page development, and some advertising. The National Wildlife Refuge program in the Keys (see: <http://www.fws.gov/nationalkeydeer>) donated a billboard on US Route 1 for signs promoting reusable bags. All of our signs and program materials were produced and graciously donated by volunteers. You may have similar resources in your community. If you have questions about how to coordinate with local organizations and businesses, please feel free to contact us.

Sources for Reusable Bags

- <http://www.chicobag.com> - the original bag that started a movement. Great info site, too.
- www.therecyclebag.com - source of bags from one of our GYB-FK volunteers, who returns a portion of the proceeds from sales to benefit our local program (a great tip for negotiation with sources for your own branded bags).
- <http://softcooler.com> - the #1 original soft cooler in the boating and aviation industry.
- www.plasticbagbanreport.com - tracks the movement worldwide (they’ve included an article on our program written by one of our volunteers).
- <http://www.envirosax.com> - stylish reusable shopping bags and the aim to educate the global community in the four areas of sustainability: environmental, social, cultural, and economic.
- <http://www.pbgreenbags.com> - reusable snack bags and sandwich wraps.

Objections / Concerns about Cleanliness

“Sanitation” issues sometimes come up as an objection to shopping with reusable bags. Here are some articles that will help you respond:

<http://news.consumerreports.org/safety/2010/07/can-reusable-grocery-bags-make-you-sick-or-is-that-just-baloney.html> - discusses rumored concerns likely based on a poorly conducted study funded by the American Chemistry Council, the trade group that advocates on behalf of plastic bag manufacturers. As stated: *“Now why would the folks who make plastic grocery bags want to cast doubts on the safety of reusable grocery bags? Oh, right.”* Reusable bags are unlikely, at best, to make people sick ... particularly if used and laundered properly.

<http://www.bulletinbag.com/faqs/washing-reusable-bags.html> - tips on how to clean all types of reusable bags.

Frequently Asked Questions

These FAQs are to address some of the questions you may be asked when visiting a retailer or business that dispenses plastic bags in their line of business.

- Should I throw away my plastic bags that I have in stock?
 - No. This will be a transition for the local population. For a while, some customers might want a plastic bag for particular items. Don't deny them, if they insist, but try to convert

them to a reusable bag. As the campaign matures there will be more customers with reusable bags.

- How about bait?
 - This is a tough one. If they are repeat customers, try to get them to bring their own bait bucket or container. You might stock some cheap bait buckets, if you don't already. If you must dispense plastic bags for bait or other raw items, please impress upon the customer to recycle responsibly.
- How about visitors?
 - We are working on a pilot program to get reusable bags to all the visitors who book rooms at the local lodgings. The South Florida day-trippers are repeat customers and will catch on eventually. This is an opportunity to promote green tourism so you can offer to sell them a reusable bag that they can use during their visit.
- I've heard the reusable bags are more harmful to the environment because of the way they are produced. Why should we use them?
 - There are many advantages to reducing plastic bags. Single-use plastic bags are an unsustainable use of natural resources, specifically petroleum. Something used only once and temporarily is an inefficient use of limited resources. Plastic bags are litter-prone and a hazard to wildlife and marine life. A reusable bag can be used repeatedly. Every time a reusable bag is used, one less disposable plastic bag is dispensed only to be tossed away shortly afterwards.
- What do you think of paper bags? Shall I offer those?
 - Paper bags with handles are more likely to be reused than those that don't have handles. They may help you during the transition, although in some ways they are not much better than plastic.

Ways to Remember

The "Got your Bags?" program is designed to help you remember your reusable bags when you shop. Here are some tips to remind you along the route from the kitchen to the checkout counter.

1. Keep your bags in your vehicle. Most veterans of this procedure keep a single bag full of bags in their vehicle.
2. Place the "Got Your Bags?" sticker somewhere on your vehicle window that you will see after parking and before you exit the car. It will help you remember to grab the bags as you turn off the car, get out of the vehicle, and head into the store. As simple as it seems, this is the most common point of forgetfulness in the process.
3. Participating businesses might have a "Got your Bags?" stencil on the driveway to their store to remind you as well. They may also have a large decal on their entrance door, like the one on your car window, which is another reminder not to enter the store without your bags. If you find yourself at the door (or at the checkout) without your bags, here's a suggestion: *Just put your items back in the shopping cart, wheel them to your car, and bag them in the parking lot!*

4. After you unpack your bags from your shopping trip, put them all in a single bag and take them back out to your car. Or, hang that bag on the doorknob to your exterior door as a reminder to take them to your car the next time you go out. Repeat from #1!

GLEE: The Pledge Retailers Program

Through GLEE, you have the option to “Take the Pledge.” All we are asking is that retailers become program supporters and reduce the use of plastic shopping bags by encouraging shoppers to utilize reusable bags, and training their staff to ask (remind) shoppers if they remembered to bring their own bags to the store (as in “Got Your Bags?”). If you would like to become more involved with the program you can contact GLEE and sign their pledge which comes with its own set of benefits. For more information, go online to www.keysglee.com/index.cfm/gyb.

Take Our Materials ... Please! (Repurpose, Revise, and Reuse!)

If you are interested in fundraising or moving forward with this campaign, GLEE encourages you to work with a local, like-minded nonprofit in your community. GLEE is pleased to provide you with materials to reuse, revise, and customize in order for you to spread the word in your community. If there is an interest, contact GLEE and they will be happy to discuss that part of our campaign with you.

If you are interested in learning more about how to become a green business, contact Alicia Betancourt, UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension Agent in the Key Largo office at 305-453-8747. Green business training consists of educating on subjects such as green office, energy efficiency, and recycling.

We are interested in any feedback that we can pass on to other business people. Please encourage other retailers to join the effort. It really makes a big difference when everyone participates! Best wishes on YOUR campaign. Keep us posted!

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