

Survey on Plastic Bag Opinions

The Committee

The Plastic Bag Minimization Committee (March 2016 through November 2016) was comprised of City of Charleston government officials, concerned local citizens, conservation groups, and business groups, including the Charleston Chamber of Commerce and Lowcountry Local First. The Committee's work was citizen-driven, formulated after community members brought the issue to Mayor John Tecklenburg for study. The purpose of this group was to evaluate options (including education or ordinances) for minimizing plastic bags because of the tendency for single use plastic bags to become litter, whether they are disposed of or recycled, whether properly or improperly. A key part of this evaluation was to understand the perspectives of citizens and business owners. Thus, an opinion survey on plastic bag usage throughout Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester Counties was created.

The Survey

A survey assessing usage of plastic bags was released to the tri-county in July of 2016. The survey had two components, one for citizens and one for businesses. It was promoted on the City of Charleston website and was distributed through the emailing lists of a variety of business organizations (including the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce and Lowcountry Local First), government and education institutions, neighborhood associations and non-profit organizations, as well as by media and word-of-mouth. The survey was open for approximately four months, and closed in November of 2016. 50% of the respondents heard about the survey through sources other than groups participating on the Committee.

Businesses

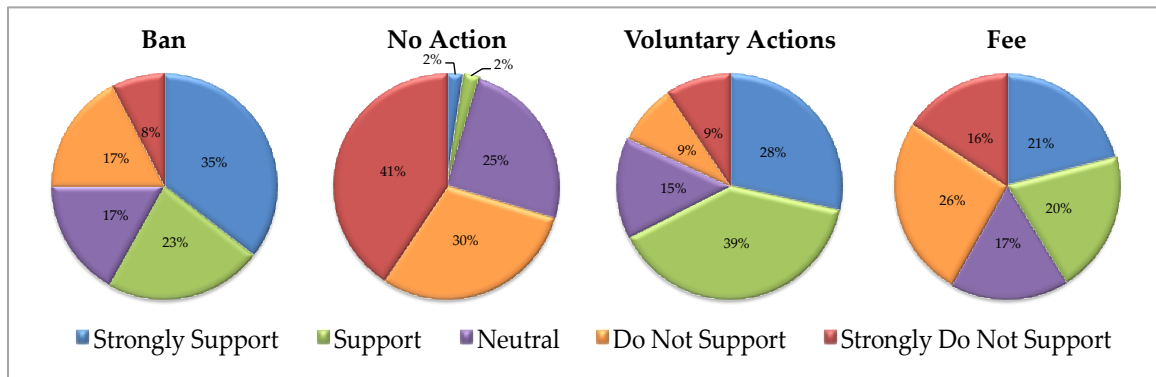
Findings

- Of the 222 businesses that responded:
 - 38.1% offer single-use plastic bags
 - 61.9% do not offer single-use plastic bags
- Of the those that do not offer plastic bags:
 - 62.3% use bags made of alternative materials
 - 36.2% do not use/need bags at all
- Of those that do offer single-use plastic bags:
 - 42.4% use single-use plastic bags exclusively
 - 57.6% offer other options such as paper bags, reusable bags or a combination of the two
 - 82.4% of businesses that offer single-use plastic bags provide less than 150 bags per day
 - 7% of business responders offer more than 1,000 plastic bags per day

Analysis

Businesses overwhelmingly agreed that they were concerned about the impacts of plastic bags as a detriment to wildlife, a source of waste and a cause of pollution. Figure 1., below, demonstrates the responses to options for reducing the use of plastic bags.

Figure 1.



Overall, businesses strongly support a ban, support voluntary actions, and are less supportive of fees. They overwhelmingly support taking some kind of action, with only 4% in favor of “No Action” taken to address the negative effects of plastic bag pollution.

Citizens

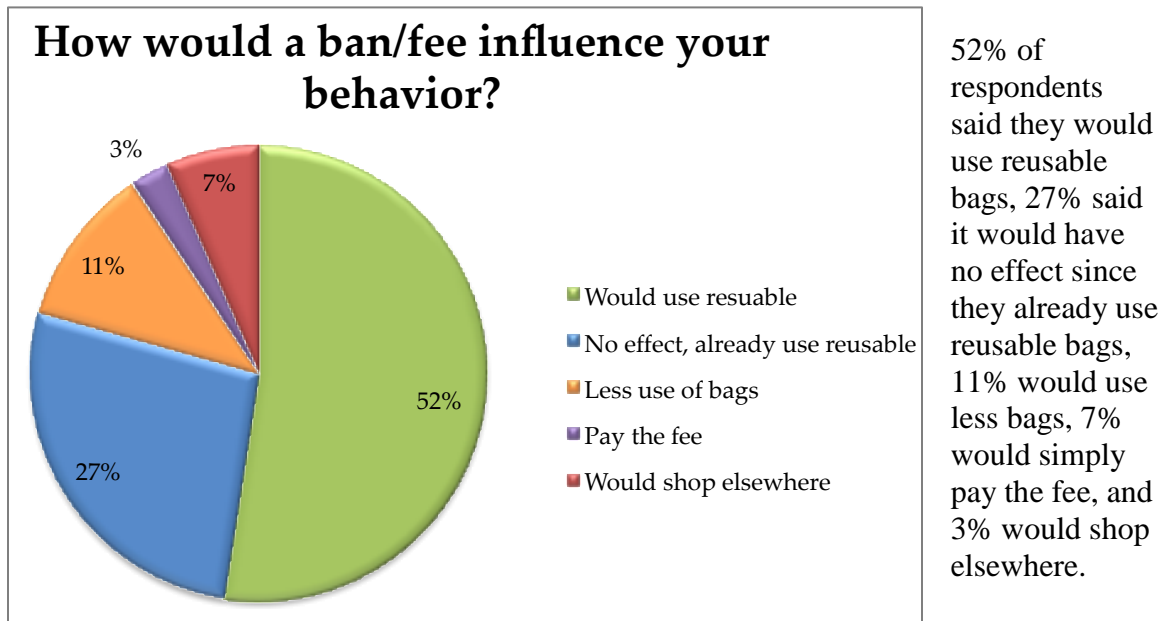
Findings

- Of the 4,733 citizens who responded:
 - When at grocery stores,
 - 15.9% always use reusable bags
 - The other 65.9% either sometimes or most of the time uses reusable bags
 - 18.2% rarely or never use reusable bags
 - When at other types of stores,
 - 5.6% always use reusable bags
 - 42% rarely or never use reusable bags
- Of the citizens who use reusable bags:
 - 82% of respondents say the largest reason that prevents them from using reusable bags is forgetting to bring them
- Of the citizens who use plastic bags:
 - 73.8%, reuse them and then dispose of them
 - 45.9% place them in the recycling bins offered at certain stores
 - 9% dispose of them immediately

Analysis

Citizens overwhelmingly, at 96%, support efforts to reduce the use of plastic bags. 83.8% of respondents would support a ban on single-use plastic bags in their municipality and 45.7% would support a fee regardless of where it goes or how much it is. The graph below, Figure 2., shows how citizens would respond after a hypothetical fee or ban is implemented.

Figure 2.



Summary

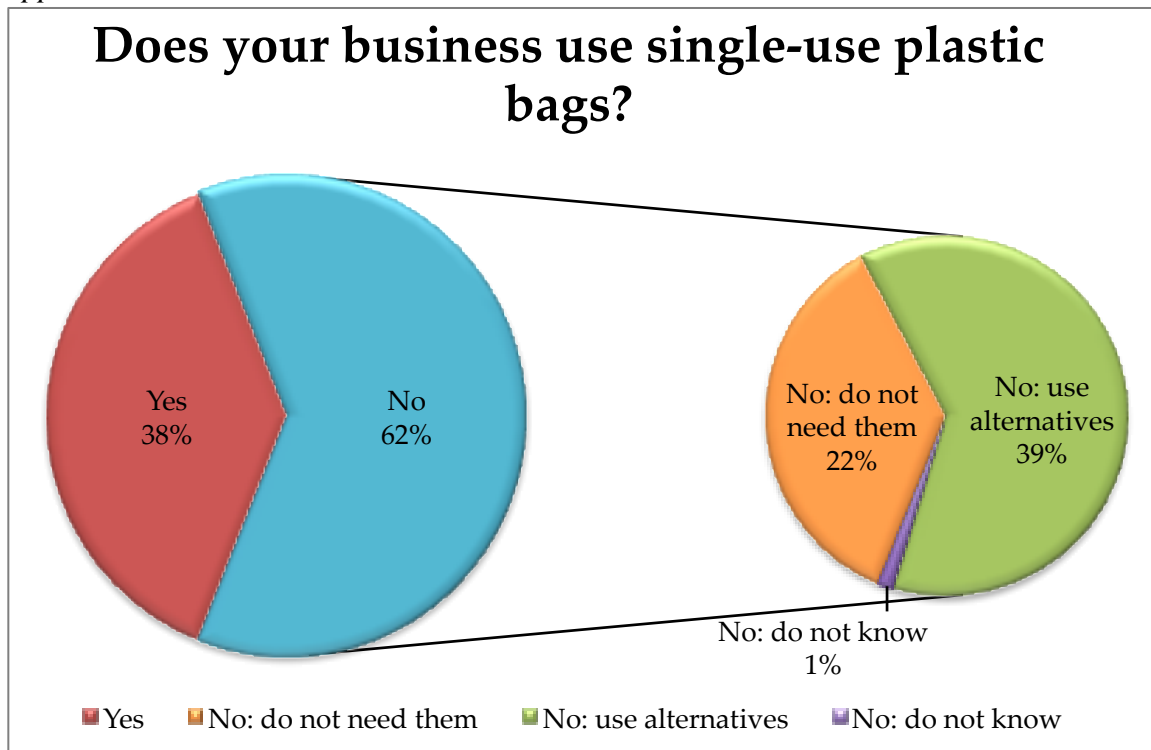
From these results, it is clear that both businesses and citizens would like action to be taken to reduce the use of single-use plastic bags. Chances for short answer responses found this trend to be evident as well. There appears to be more support for a ban rather than a fee.

Coalition

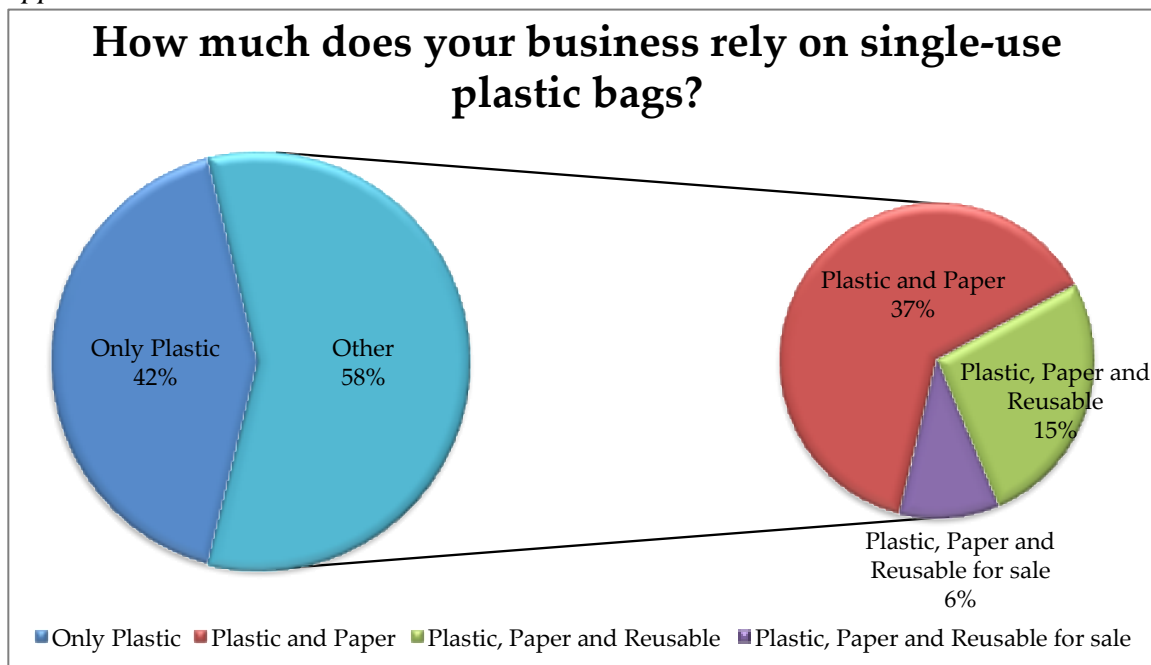
- Charleston County Environmental Management
- Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce
- Charleston Waterkeeper
- City of Charleston
- Individual Citizens
- Medical University of South Carolina
- Keep Charleston Beautiful
- Lowcountry Local First
- South Carolina Aquarium
- South Carolina Coastal Conservation League
- Surfrider Foundation, Charleston Chapter

Appendices

Appendix A

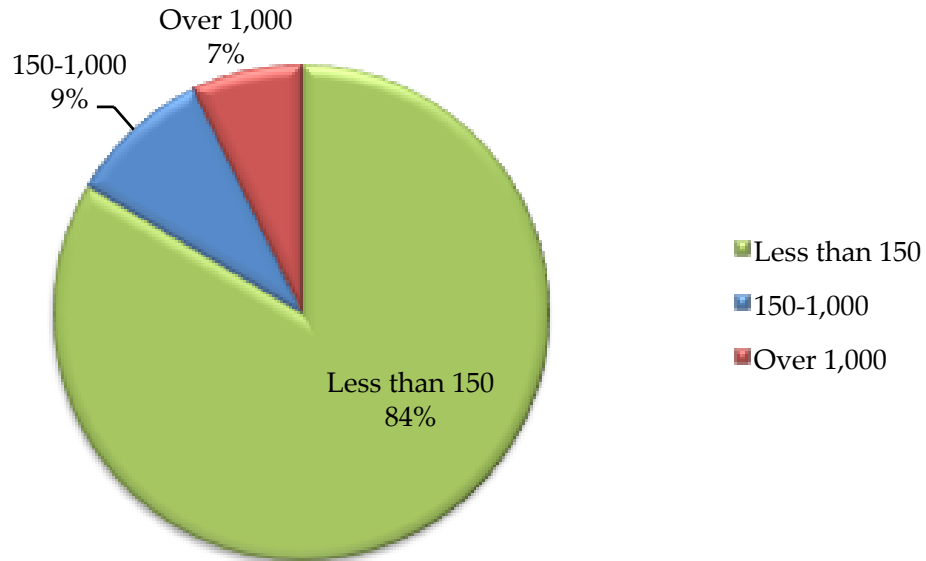


Appendix B



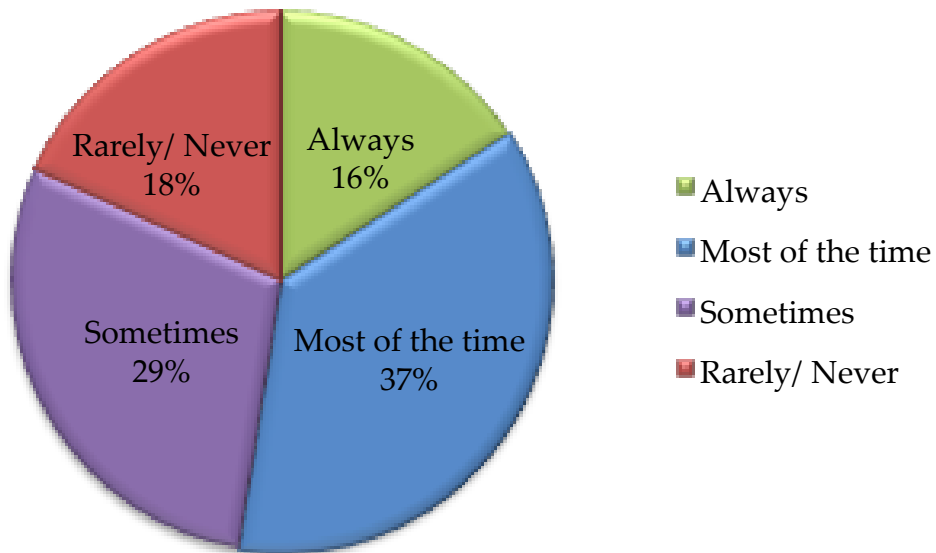
Appendix C

How many single-use plastic bags does your business provide to customers per day?

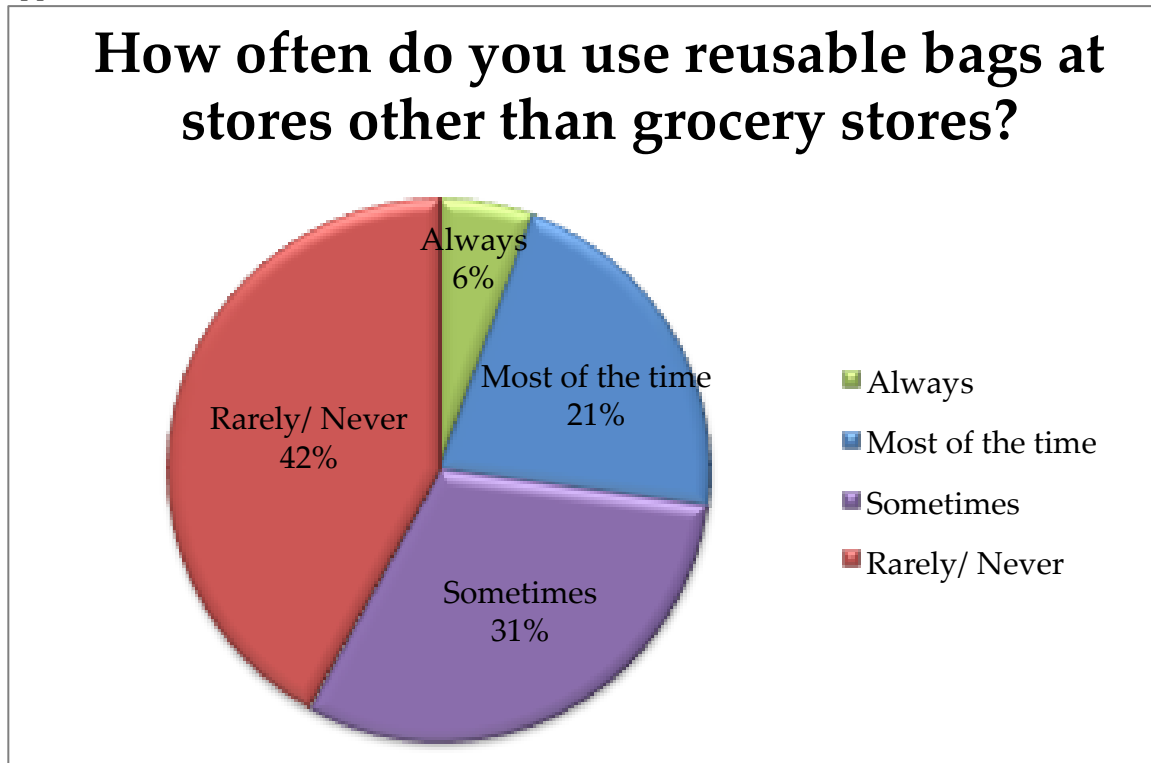


Appendix D

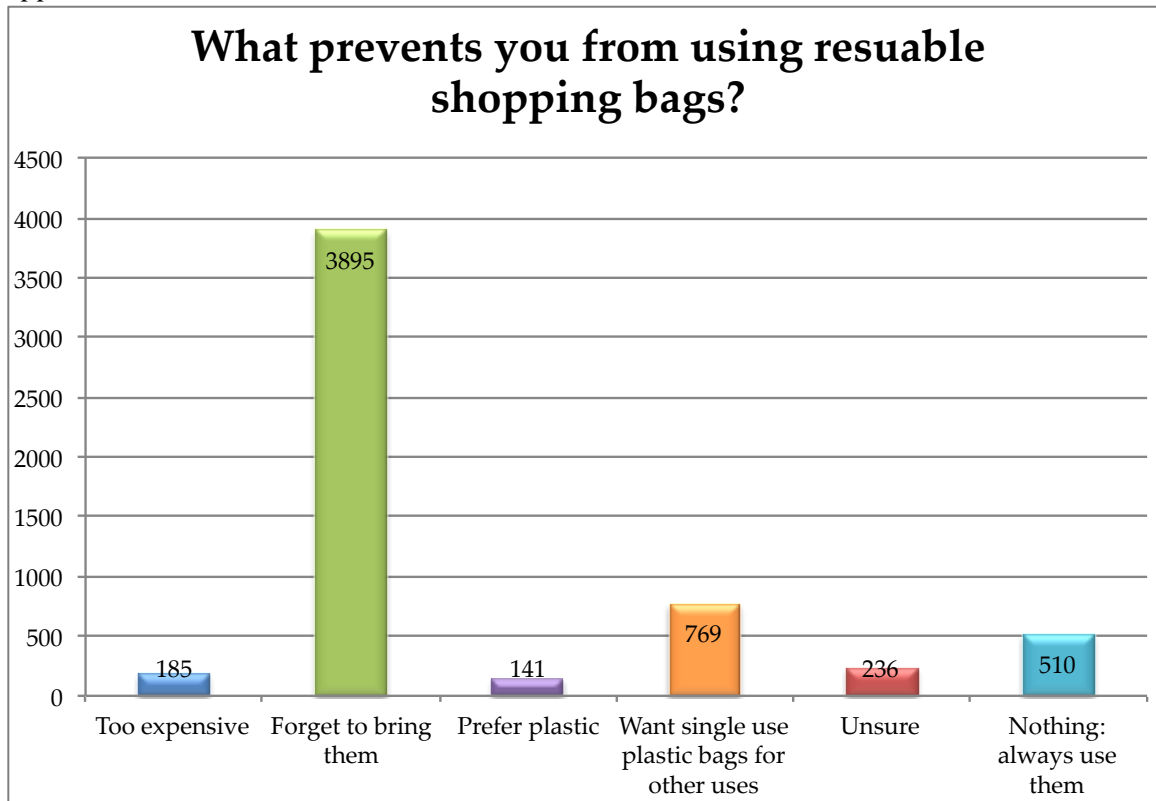
How often do you use reusable bags at grocery stores?



Appendix E

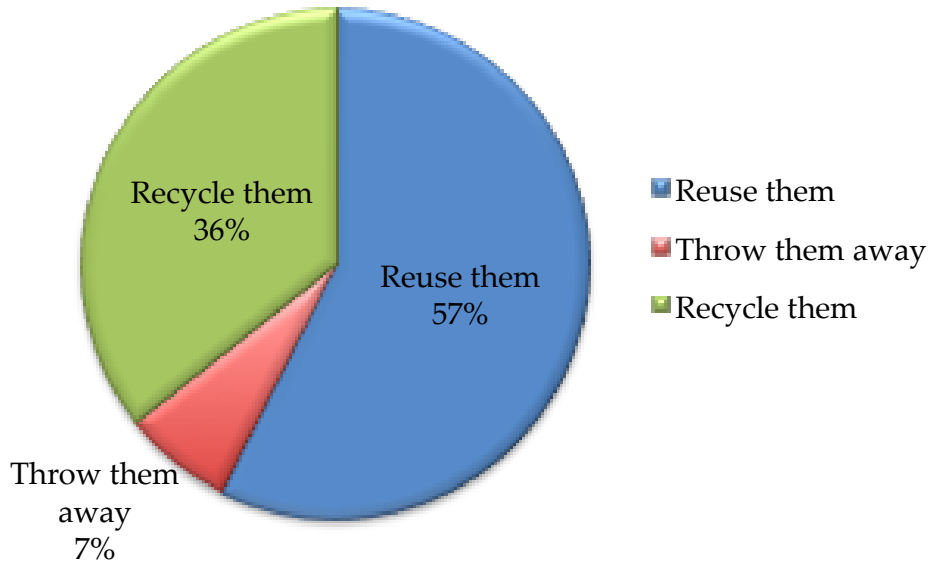


Appendix F



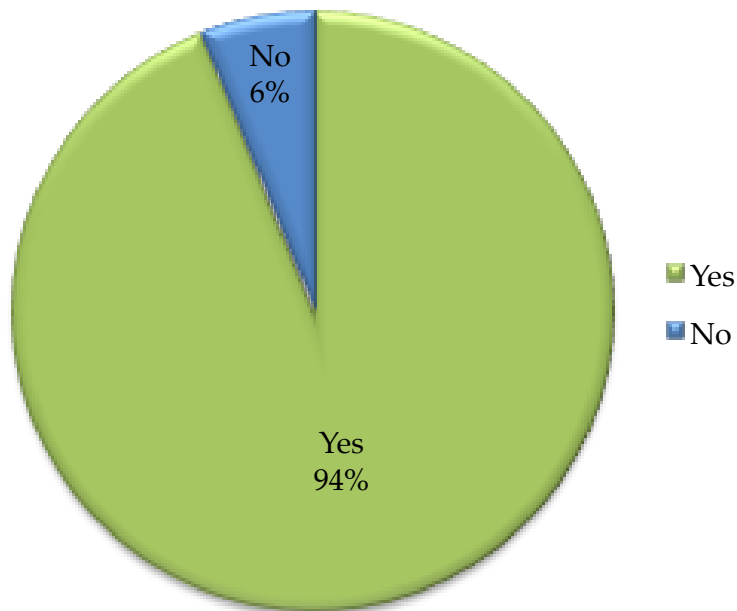
Appendix G

What do you do with plastic bags after you receive them from a store?

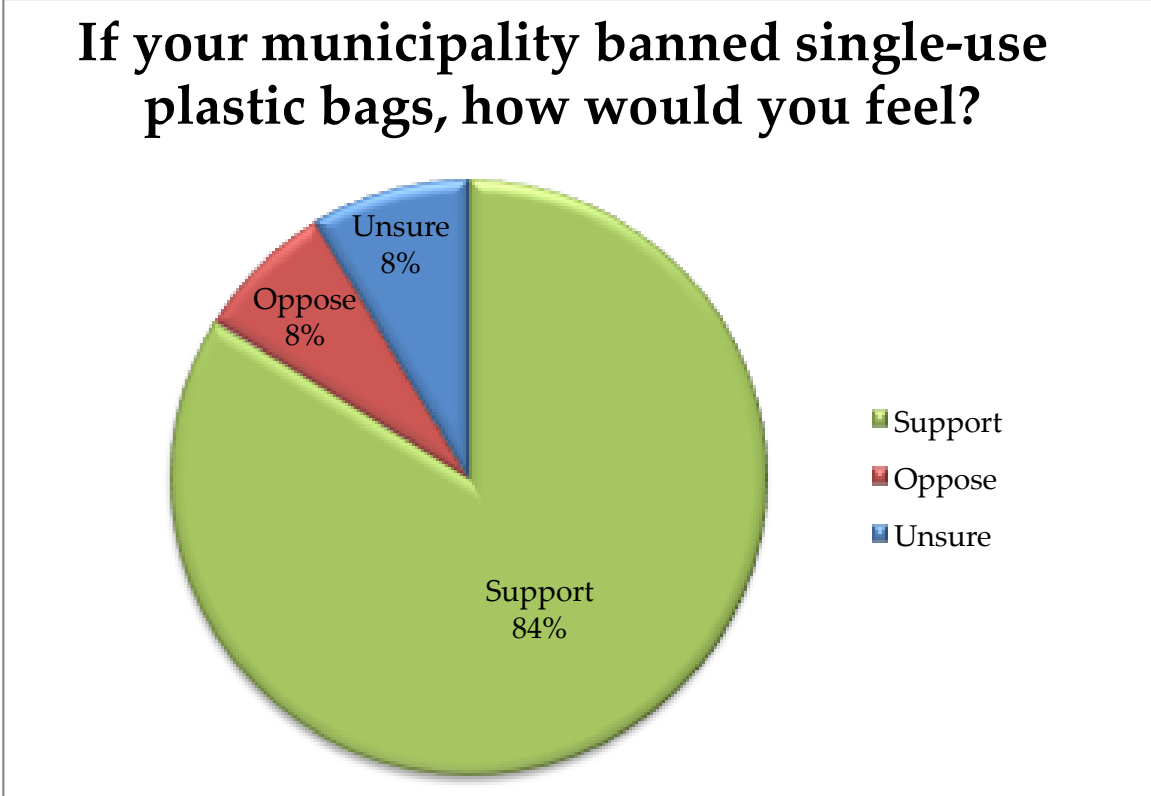


Appendix H

Do you support efforts to reduce the use of plastic bags?



Appendix I



Appendix J

