

Halifax advocates trash the use of plastic shopping bags

BRETT BUNDALE
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HALIFAX—As the fight against the ubiquitous plastic shopping bag ratchets up around the world, Atlantic Canada's biggest municipality is looking to join the growing ranks of cities and countries banning, restricting or taxing single-use plastic bags.

Halifax council asked city staff this week to examine a plastic-bag ban, a move that would follow the lead of Montreal, where single-use plastic bags were banned at the start of the year, and Victoria, where a ban takes effect July 1.

Mayor Mike Savage will also pen a letter to Nova Scotia's premier calling for a province-wide ban on plastic bags — often called "Sobeys bags" in the Maritimes regardless of their provenance.

But the city is not waiting for the province to act, with Halifax solid waste manager Matthew Keliher promising to report back to council within a year.

Plastic bags, which take centuries to break down, litter the environment and inundate the world's oceans, are also turning up in seafood, says Mark Butler with Halifax's Ecology Action Centre.



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"They are clogging our oceans, and can be a hazard to marine wildlife," said Butler, policy director for the environmental advocacy organization. "We're finding microscopic plastic particles on the beach and in seafood."

It's a problem that has prompted countries, including France, Italy and China, to

implement restrictions, taxes and outright bans.

During a recent debate, some Halifax councillors expressed support for curtailing or banning single-use plastic bags.

Richard Zurawski told council there is a "moral obligation" to future generations to halt plastic-bag use, noting that plastics

Plastic-bag use can have a negative impact on the environment. This has prompted many jurisdictions to curtail their use or ban them.

are produced using fossil fuels and contribute to carbon emissions and climate change.

"Plastic use has tripled over the last decade. We have to stop the plastic tide," the councillor for a largely suburban area west of downtown said. "It's a climate apocalypse and we're staring it in the face, and we have a chance to make a difference with this plastic issue. I don't want to see us miss this opportunity."

Other councillors expressed concern with rushing into a ban, and questioned what residents would do with pet waste and items such as recyclable paper, which must be separated from other recycling in Halifax and put into plastic bags.

Still, Halifax councillors appeared prepared to work through those issues, suggesting the city could introduce blue bins for recycling and black bins for garbage, as is the case in other cities, rather than use plastic bags.