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### The El Paso Pigeon

The first time I saw an “El Paso pigeon” was summer 2012. My brother-in-law and I were standing in the backyard when he pointed up and said, “Look, there is an El Paso pigeon.” At first, I didn’t know what he meant because I was looking at the sky, searching for any kind of bird, but I couldn’t see anything. “Right there in the tree,” he said and pointed at a plastic bag. Then, I didn’t think about those “pigeons,” but since that day, I’ve see those bags wherever I go. They are flying around, hanging in trees, or piling up on fences. Not only that, they mess up the appearance of the city, harm the environment, and cause floods when they are stuck in storm drains.

El Paso noticed this problem some time ago, but there were no major decisions made since a council meeting about recycling in September 2012. According to *The El Paso Times*, on Monday, September 17<sup>th</sup> during a special meeting on how to clean up the city and prevent the plastic bags from clogging storm drains, the Council voted to continue encouraging the public to recycle plastic shopping bags. Northeast city representative Carl Robinson said, “we are continuing to support citizens of El Paso to recycle their plastic bags.” This is a good way to start, but the city must do more. We need to ban plastic bags like in Los Angeles and other cities in the United States.

Change comes in small steps. When people stop using single-use plastic bags, they will take a positive step. There are many other ways to carry groceries home. In Germany, where I

was born, people use cloth bags, foldable plastic boxes, paper bags, and reusable plastic bags. Those are better for the environment because we can use them repeatedly. All of those options are much better than single-use plastic bags.

According a 2009 study by the EPA, one hundred billion plastic bags are used per year in the US; this means that every minute two hundred thousand plastic bags are used, and each of those need four hundred to one thousand years to degrade. Another scary number is the twelve million barrels of oil used to produce plastic bags, which could have produced five hundred million gallons of fuel. If people stopped using plastic bags, the country could use these resources for something more important; additionally, by using cloth bags, people would contribute to saving the planet.

Some people say that plastic bags are not as harmful to the environment as cloth bags. In a *Wall Street Journal* article, Todd Myers wrote, “Plastic bags have the lowest environmental impact on ‘human toxicity’ and ‘marine aquatic toxicity’ as well as ‘global-warming potential.’” He also said that we need to use paper bags four times and cloth bags one hundred seventy three times to come even with one plastic bag. Those are big numbers, but people can use cloth bags more than that, and if a cloth bag breaks, it still will be recycled faster and better than any plastic bag ever will. Additionally, we’ve still saved all the oil needed to create plastic bags.

Everything has positives and negatives, but if people do not change the way they treat the environment, everybody will have to pay the price. To stop using those single-use plastic bags is a little step, but it is a step in the right direction, and everybody knows that we have to walk first before we can start running. We should think about changing because if we keep using single-use plastic bags, those “El Paso pigeons” will multiply until it is too late for change.