



**DRAFT AS OF 2/17/11**

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Contact: Katie Christopher  
P: 202.974.5084  
christopherk@ruderfinn.com

Laura Chamberlin  
Program Manager  
Alice Ferguson Foundation  
P: 202-973-8203  
lchamberlin@fergusonfoundation.org

## **STUDY OF U.S CAPITAL'S PLASTIC BAG FEE INDICATES BEHAVIORAL CHANGE AND POSITIVE SUPPORT**

***Research Shows Litter is a Widespread Issue for Washington, D.C Residents and Businesses***

Washington, DC (**February 17, 2011**) — Today, Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF), a leader of the Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative and environmental education in the Washington, D.C. metro area, released data from research on ***“Public Perceptions and Willingness to Address Litter in the District of Columbia”***. The research examines current opinions and perceptions of the District of Columbia citizens and business community on litter and public policy approaches, with special attention to the city’s bag fee.

The research, funded by the District Department of Environment (DDOE), concluded:

- Littering is a widespread problem in the District, with as many as four in ten residents actively littering;
- Unwanted litter is a problem for many of the District businesses surveyed; it results in increased operational costs; and
- The recent D.C. bag fee has been overwhelmingly effective in changing behavior, with **75%** of District residents reporting a reduction in their bag usage; and businesses reporting drastic reductions in bag usage.

“The public opinion poll provided us with valuable information that will help to inform our ongoing litter prevention programs,” said Tracy Bowen, with the Alice Ferguson Foundation, “The results from this survey prove that behavior can be changed and that our upcoming cross-jurisdictional litter prevention campaign *will* have an impact.”

AFF has a goal for a trash free Potomac Watershed by 2013, and is collaborating with government and business partners throughout the region to prepare a regional litter prevention campaign set to launch this spring. The research released today is an important part of this larger effort to gather valuable



insights and understanding. It will allow AFF to design strategies to challenge regional citizens to think about their actions and to change their littering ways.

### **Research Methodology**

AFF worked with social marketing research firm, OpinionWorks, to gather public opinion and business community data through three approaches: 1) telephone opinion poll of 600 randomly-selected District of Columbia residents throughout all eight wards; 2) focus groups of citizens who were admitted litterers; 3) one-on-one interviews with 51 D.C.-based business owners and managers to assess their first hand experience in implementing the bag fee, as well as their experience with litter and trash. 90% of the companies interviewed are regulated by the bag fee and include such businesses as liquor stores, convenience stores, coffee shops, grocery stores, restaurants/carryouts, hotels, large retail stores and institutions.

Key findings of the research included the following:

### **Litter is a Problem for Citizens and the Business Community**

Littering is a widespread problem in the District, with many citizens admitting to engaging in this behavior and many others observing it and bothered by it. Likewise many District business owners and managers stated that littering has impacts on their business.

- 68% of citizens report that they see others tossing litter on the ground or in water often or sometimes. Between 12% to 40% of citizens reported that they litter, depending on the type of litter.
- While 85% know littering is against the law, only 7% think there is a good chance a litterer will get caught.
- Unwanted litter is a problem for 40% of the District businesses interviewed, with 23% of businesses stating that they commit resources to cleaning up trash around their property.
- When asked what the City could be doing to help businesses deal with the litter problem, most want more street and sidewalk sweeping, and some ask for better law enforcement of anti-littering laws.

### **Five-Cent Bag Fee Drastically Changes Citizen Behavior:**

In January 2010, the *Anacostia River Cleanup and Protection Act of 2009*, placed a five-cent fee on plastic and paper bags in businesses selling food or alcohol throughout the nation's capital. AFF's research shows that the bag fee has drastically changed behavior of citizens in their bag usage, and found overwhelming positive support for this law.

"Through AFF's research, we were able to gather opinions from residents and a diverse set of businesses impacted by the bag fee" said Christophe Tulou, Director, DDOE. "Responses were favorable and knowledge of the five-cent fee seems to be close to universal. The bag fee is an extraordinary example of how public policy can have a positive impact for our environment."

- 75% of District residents respondents polled indicated that they have reduced their bag use since the fee was introduced in January 2010.



- A majority of businesses said their consumption of bags is at least 50% lower as a result of the fee.
- 78% of businesses had neutral or positive responses to the how the bag fee was impacting their businesses -- 58% of businesses surveyed reported the bag fee has not affected their business at all; 20% said it has affected their business positively. Only 12% of business owners and managers said the bag fee has affected their business negatively.
- When asked specifically what positives they see from the law, business owners and managers mentioned a reduction in litter and a benefit to their bottom line as they had to spend less on bags.
- When asked specifically what negatives they see from the law, business owners/managers mentioned that some customers complain about the 5-cent fee, and that they are skeptical about where the money goes within the DC government.
- When asked what the District of Columbia can do to better help the business community implement the law, the greatest response by businesses is for the DC government to provide more publicity of the law, which explains the fee to customers and how the government is using the fee.

For further information on the AFF research, please visit [www.fergusonfoundation.org](http://www.fergusonfoundation.org) or call 202.973.8203.

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### **About Alice Ferguson Foundation**

The Alice Ferguson Foundation (AFF) was established in 1954 as a non-profit organization chartered in the state of Maryland. Its mission is to provide experiences that encourage connections between people, the natural environment, farming and the cultural heritage of the Potomac River Watershed, which lead to personal environmental responsibility. AFF shares the wonder and excitement of the Potomac River, a 330-acre working farm (Hard Bargain Farm), woods and wetlands each year with more than 10,000 students from the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area.

The ***Trash Free Potomac Watershed Initiative*** (TFPWI) is a region-wide effort spearheaded by the Alice Ferguson Foundation to reduce trash and litter, increase recycling, education, and awareness of trash issues in the Potomac Watershed. The primary goal of TFPWI is to create a "Trash Free Potomac by 2013." The goals of TFPWI are being addressed through the *Potomac River Watershed Trash Treaty*, *Annual Potomac River Watershed Trash Summit*, *Annual Potomac River Watershed Cleanup*, and *Regional Public Education & Awareness Campaigns*. For more information on these programs or to volunteer, visit [www.Fergusonfoundation.org](http://www.Fergusonfoundation.org) or call (202) 973-8203 and (301) 292-5665.



### **About OpinionWorks**

OpinionWorks conducts frequent opinion studies in Maryland and the surrounding states. They are the polling organization for *The Baltimore Sun*, having accurately forecast the 14-point gubernatorial margin in 2010, and have polled for numerous other media throughout the region. They work for state and local agencies throughout the Mid-Atlantic, and for a variety of non-profit and for-profit entities within the region and nationally. For more information, please visit [www.OpinionWorks.com](http://www.OpinionWorks.com).

### **About District Department of the Environment**

The District Department of the Environment funded this research to further the District of Columbia's understanding of how citizens are affected by litter, examine the effects of government policy, and develop a strategy for changing the behavior of those citizens and visitors to the District who dispose of their trash improperly. DDOE is the lead District agency for compliance with federal Clean Water Act requirements, including requirements for pollution caused by trash. The EPA has issued a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), or trash diet, for the Anacostia Watershed. This is a first in the Nation multi-state TMDL for trash, which includes Maryland's Prince Georges and Montgomery Counties and the District. In addition DDOE is the lead agency for implementing the Anacostia Clean Up and Protection Act. This legislation place a \$0.05 fee on all non-reusable bags sold at stores that sell food and/or alcohol. Revenues from the fee are administered by DDOE and used to restore and protect the Anacostia River and other District waterways.