

Woodstock Kicks the Plastic Bag Habit

Sustainable Woodstock, a new campaigning group in Woodstock received a grant from Oxfordshire County Council to help reduce the number of plastic bags in the town. The group carried out a survey of retailers in the town and whilst the results showed that some thought they would have difficulty in abandoning plastic bags, there was general support for the idea that too many plastic bags were handed out and that something needs to be done.

The Household Waste Reduction Officer with Oxfordshire County Council said, "We want to encourage more towns like Woodstock to eliminate or at least reduce the use of plastic bags and we are pleased to offer financial support to voluntary groups who are prepared to take up the baton.

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/plasticbagfree

Sustainable Woodstock has other ambitious plans. Colin Carritt, chairman of the group said, "Once we have the plastic bag project up and running we want to turn our attention to energy conservation and maybe even a microgeneration scheme. The group also wants to encourage recycling and waste

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reduction and is due to hold its second 'Swap Shop' in January 2010. For more information please view our website.

Reusable Bags Are Best for Both Consumers and the Environment

Edited from [Larry West](#), About.com

The next time the sales assistant asks whether you prefer "paper or plastic" for your purchases, consider giving the truly eco-friendly response and saying, "neither."

Plastic bags end up as litter that contaminates the landscape, and kills thousands upon thousands of marine mammals every year that mistake floating bags for food. Plastic bags that are buried in landfills may take up to 1,000 years to break down, and in the process they separate into smaller and smaller toxic particles that contaminate soil and water. What's more, the production of plastic bags consumes millions of gallons of oil.

Is Paper Better Than Plastic?

Paper bags, which many people consider a better alternative to plastic bags, carry their own set of environmental problems. For example, according to the American Forest and Paper Association, in 1999 the U.S. alone used 10 billion

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paper grocery bags, which adds up to a lot of trees.

Reusable Bags Are a Better Option?

But if you decline both paper and plastic bags, then how do you get your shopping home? The answer, according to many environmentalists, is high-quality reusable shopping bags made of materials that don't harm the environment during production and don't need to be discarded after each use. Many shops now carry reusable shopping bags.

Experts estimate that 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are consumed and discarded each year worldwide—more than a million per minute.

Here are a few facts about plastic bags to help demonstrate the value of reusable bags to consumers and the environment:

- Plastic bags aren't biodegradable. They actually go through a process called photodegradation. This means they break down into smaller and smaller toxic particles that contaminate both soil and water, and end up entering the food chain when animals accidentally ingest them.
- According to the Environmental Protection Agency, more than 380 billion plastic bags are used in the United

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States alone each year. Of those, approximately 100 billion are plastic shopping bags, which cost retailers about £ 2.5 billion annually.

- According to various estimates, Taiwan consumes 20 billion plastic bags annually (900 per person), Japan consumes 300 billion bags each year (300 per person), and Australia consumes 6.9 billion plastic bags annually (326 per person).
- Hundreds of thousands of whales, dolphins, sea turtles and other marine mammals die every year after eating discarded plastic bags they mistake for food.
- Discarded plastic bags have become so common in Africa they have generated a cottage industry. People there collect the bags and use them to weave hats, bags and other goods. According to the BBC, one such group routinely collects 30,000 bags every month.
- Plastic bags as litter have even become commonplace in Antarctica and other remote areas. According to David Barnes, a marine scientist with the British Antarctic Survey, plastic bags have gone from being rare in the late 1980s and early 1990s to being almost everywhere in Antarctica.

Some governments have recognized the severity of the problem and are taking action to help combat it.

Strategic Taxes Can Cut Plastic Bag Use

In 2001, for example, Ireland was using 1.2 billion plastic bags annually, about 316 per person. In 2002, the Irish government imposed a [plastic bag consumption tax](#) (called a PlasTax), which has reduced consumption by 90%. The tax of 10p per bag is paid by consumers when they check out at the shop. Besides cutting back on litter, Ireland's tax has saved approximately 18 million litres of oil. Several other governments around the world are now considering a similar tax on plastic bags.

Governments Use the Law to Limit Plastic Bags

More recently, [Japan passed a law](#) that empowers the government to issue warnings to merchants that overuse plastic bags and don't do enough to "reduce, reuse or recycle." In Japanese culture, it is common for stores to wrap each item in its own bag, which the Japanese consider a matter of both good hygiene and respect or politeness.

Paper,
Plastic,
Or
Something
Better?

Please spare a
minute to consider.

