

PLASTIC BAGS

Plastic bags have become a major symbol of our society's growing waste problem. With Australians using 6.9 billion plastic shopping bags every year, it is believed that less than 1% of them are being reused and only 10% are recycled (Clean Up Australia). Not only are plastic bags wasteful of resources and energy and a litter and disposal problem, they are also harmful to wildlife.

Plastic bags create visual pollution problems and are a particularly noticeable part of the litter stream due to their size and because up to 80 million have found their way on to our streets, parks, and waterways. They are of particular concern in marine and other aquatic

environments and can travel large distances creating regional and global consequences. Marine animals can suffer from entanglement, suffocation, and ingestion.

Any program to reduce plastic bag use must include a mix of approaches. For example, legislative means, educational campaigns and active support from supermarkets and other major plastic bag contributors. Plastic bags are every individual's problem and therefore the problem they create must be seen as everyone's responsibility.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- The Victorian Litter Action Alliance offers tips on reducing plastic bag use, available at <http://www.litter.vic.gov.au>
- Eliminate or reduce your use of plastic bags and recycle. When shopping, use alternatives such as calico bags, string bags, baskets and boxes. It's handy to keep these items in the car.
- If you are reducing your waste by recycling and composting or worm farming, then you no longer need to use plastic bags in your home waste bins. If you do need a plastic bag try reusing bread bags, or using newspaper as an alternative.
- Always ask yourself 'Do I need that plastic bag?' For example, could your fruits and vegetables be purchased loose instead?
- Reuse plastic bags as much as possible, for example storage and lunches.
- Many supermarkets offer recycling facilities for plastic bags. Take your used bags back for recycling the next time you go shopping. If you can't find the recycling bin or there are no recycling facilities available, ask the manager about their recycling policy.
- Encourage and/or lobby your local shops to reduce plastic bag. Call on the Australian Supermarket Institute to develop a code of practice to minimise the use of plastic bags by retailers and their customers and to generate sustainable alternatives.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.cleanup.com.au/au/Campaigns/say-no-to-plastic-bags.html - Clean Up Australia's comprehensive site on plastic bag issues and reduction.
- www.environment.gov.au/settlements/waste/plastic-bags/index.html - Environment Australia site on where Australia is currently at in the plastic bag battle.
- www.noplasticbags.org.au - All the latest news on the war against plastic bags in Australia, including a help line!