

Say NO to Plastic Bags



Remote Northern Territory Communities Plastic Bag Survey for Community Stores

Key Findings Report

September 2006

Introduction

As part of the Say NO to Plastic Bags campaign, Clean Up Australia with funding from the Northern Territory Government's Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts conducted a survey on plastic bag use in remote community stores.

The survey was developed in consultation with Clean Up Australia Staff, Paul Josif from Northern Land Council and the Arnhem Land Progress Association. The format and content of the survey were intended to be clear, simple and easy to complete.

A prompt sheet was incorporated into the survey to assist communities easily understand the different plastic bag alternatives from an environmental and economic viewpoint.

The survey was distributed through the networks of Keep Australia Beautiful Northern Territory who were in direct contact with community stores and through their regular communication channels, the survey was distributed to 60 community stores.

In order to ensure a good return rate, Clean Up Australia also included Reply Paid Envelopes with the survey. A return rate of 22% was achieved, with 13 valid surveys returned. The key findings on the returned surveys, as outlined below, will determine the direction of the rest of the project.

Key Findings - Statistical

Plastic Bag Use



100% of returned surveys indicated that stores had already banned plastic bags. Therefore; did not charge for plastic bags, or re-stock bags. This was a critical key finding.



The average number of years which all the stores indicated that had been 'Plastic Bag Free' was **5 years**.



The lowest range (most recent community to go plastic bag free) was 1.5 years ago, the highest range 10 years, although one community mentioned they had never used plastic bags.*



Of those who answered the question, **90%** of returned surveys indicated reasons for banning plastic bags to be environmental / litter related.



The question on the customers' reactions to a ban showed the **majority** of customers had no reaction, no problem or were happy to see plastic bags go (90%).

Formal Policy



62% of stores had a formal policy on plastic bags, and 38% did not. Of those who did, 100% stated their customers were aware of this policy, however only 40% displayed the policy in store.



Of those who do not have a formal policy, **25%** said they would consider it, 25% were unsure and 50% said they would not consider a formal policy.

Use of Alternatives



100% of stores use plastic bag alternatives. The majority using paper bags, cardboard boxes, polypropylene 'green' bags or calico bags.

**Please note; Plastic Bags were introduced to Australia approximately 25 years ago.*

Key Findings - Statistical

Use of Alternatives Cont'd



Average use of Plastic Bag alternatives:

Paper Bags: 1,033 per week (77% of stores surveyed indicated they use)

Cardboard Boxes: 300 per week (85% of stores surveyed indicated they use)

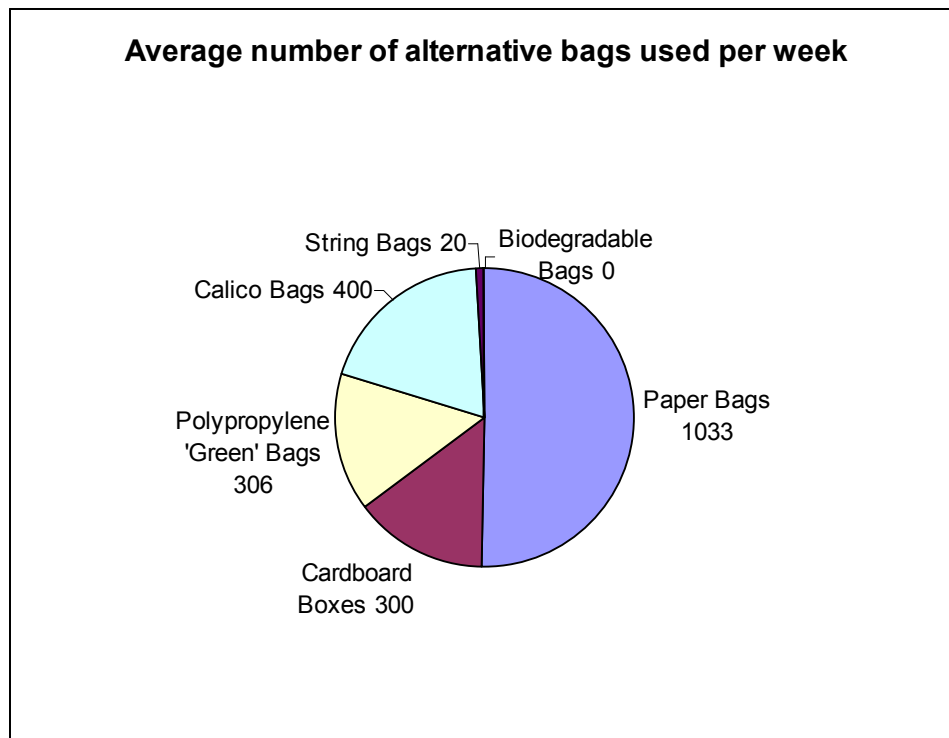
Polypropylene Bags: 306 per week (23% of stores surveyed indicated they use)

Calico Bags: 400 per week (31% of stores surveyed indicated they use)

String Bags: 20 per week (8% of stores surveyed indicated they use)

Biodegradable Bags: 0 per week (0% of stores surveyed indicated they use)

The chart below reflects the above information on average use of alternatives per week proportionally to each other. Please remember; the stores surveyed do not use plastic bags at all.



75% do not charge for alternative bags; **25%** of stores surveyed charge \$\$ for the use of at least one of these alternatives, mostly calico or polypropylene bags. The average charge being \$1.65 for calico bags and \$2.00 for polypropylene bags.



Customer's reactions to these alternatives were found to be mostly either Positive (63%) or No Reaction (34%) with only one Negative reaction to string bags (4%) where the store manager finds the customers prefer cardboard boxes. Other feedback from customers on alternatives included one store indicating they tried calico bags but the customers found them too small.

Key Findings – Statistical

Changing Behaviour



55% of stores indicated there had not been a community awareness campaign about plastic bags in their area, 36% said there had been, and 9% were unsure.



Of the stores which indicated there had been an awareness campaign, **100%** said it had been effective



Half the stores surveyed said they would use stickers and/or posters to encourage the use of plastic bag alternatives, and the other half said they would not, indicating it is not needed as they don't use plastic bags or that stickers / posters don't last.



All stores indicated the decisions about the running of the store are made by a committee, the store manager or ALPA.

Key Findings - Anecdotal

Why did your store stop using plastic bags.....

'Community asked us to get rid of them, pollution and environmental damage'
Sue Hansen, Milikapiti Store

'Too much mess around Mt Liebig'
Tim Williams, Amandurr nsa Store

'Managers Choice; Aircraft risk, Bags in thermals'
James Butler, Lajamanu Store

Do people that use the store offer opinions on plastic bags?

'They do not like them blowing around'
Sue Hansen, Milikapiti Store

'The subject never arises as it is accepted they are banned'
Alan Wilson, Mikbamurra Store

What do you think about plastic bags?

'It is no good for our community'
Jules Kerinaia, Milikapiti Store

'They are too messy'
Sidney Cole, Murrinhpatha Nimmipa Store

Cont'd...What do you think about plastic bags?

'I don't like them or think them necessary but find it crazy that wrapping on all goods is also plastic!'

Sue Hansen, Milikapiti Store

'Bad for the environment'

Mark Warrington, Mipatha Takeaway

'Do not wish to use them; they are an extremely untidy waste product in communities'

Tracey Buck, Kunbarllanjna Store

'As a substitute for paper bags when it comes to carrying freezer / chiller products but the negativity of plastic bags outweighs any pros'

Alan Wilson, Mikbamurra Store

What has your store done to encourage plastic bag alternatives?

'Home Delivery Service, on the hour, every hour'

James Butler, Lajamanu Store

'Having recycled boxes available, calico carry bags prominently displayed'

Alan Wilson, Mikbamurra Store

'Make plastic unavailable and charge \$2.00 for green bag'

G. Harrod-Edglon, Nguhurr Store

'We have only paper bags and cardboard boxes'

Liz Hanakowski, Yuendumu Store

How do you recommend Clean Up Australia goes about getting educational information across to the community?

'Inform people of the harm plastic bags do to our wildlife'

Jules Kerinaia, Milikapiti Store

'Stop buying plastic bags and buy the alternative bags'

Sidney Cole, Murrinhpatha Nimmipa Store

'Make it visual, in schools'

Sue Hansen, Milikapiti Store

'No words, lots of pictures'

Mark Warrington, Mipatha Takeaway

'Visits by KAB representatives and community discussions. Eye catching posters / stickers'

Alan Wilson, Mikbamurra

'School, Education'

Michael Alleman, Santa Teresa Store

'Council litter fines'

G. Harrod-Edglon, Nguhurr Store

'Media'

Liz Hanakowski, Yuendumu Store

Conclusion

The statistical and anecdotal findings from the community store surveys have proved very useful in assessing the next steps and direction for the remainder of the project.

Given that all of the stores which returned surveys have already banned plastic bags, it is difficult to give a true indication of how many community stores across the Northern Territory have already done this. Those stores which are active and have a strong belief on the issue are potentially more likely to return this type of survey than those more passive or indifferent about plastic bags.

Working from the information we do have, there are clearly a large number of stores and communities who have already demonstrated they can successfully rid their local environment of plastic bags.

The direction for the remainder of the project should focus on taking these experiences and finding ways to disseminate this across a broader audience.

The survey has proven a useful tool in determining the 'plastic bag' behaviour of some remote community stores in the Northern Territory.
