BAG YOURSELF A BETTER ENVIRONMENT – TEACHERS AID

Bag Yourself a Better Environment is a national Plastic Bag education and action program.

We encourage you to use this campaign information to educate your students on the environmental impacts of plastic bags and to demonstrate positive action that can be taken now to make a difference. The following information will guide you through the programs key messages, suggested activities and an interactive competition that your school can participate in.

We challenge the youth of Australia to REFUSE, REDUCE, REUSE, RECYLE plastic bags.

IMPORTANT PLASTIC BAG FACTS

The following information can be used to educate students on plastic bags:

- 6.9 billion plastic shopping bags are used in Australia every year!
- If they were tied together, they would circle the world 42 ½ times.
- It takes the average Australian family only four trips to the supermarket to receive 60 plastic bags!
- Plastic is a recyclable resource.
- Plastic bags are manufactured from non-renewable resources – oil and gas.
- The amount of petroleum used to make a plastic bag would drive a car about 11 metres.
- Australians dump 230,000 recyclable plastic bags in landfills every hour.
- Plastic bags can take between 20 and 1000 years to breakdown in the environment.

THE LIFE OF A PLASTIC BAG

- Students can map the life of a plastic bag through a drawing or flow chart. Use the following statements to trigger responses:
    - What are plastic bags made from? (oil and gas)
    - How do plastic bags come into your home (supermarket, local shop, takeaway etc)
    - What happens to the plastic bag at home (used in the bin, put in a draw, thrown out, used to store food, recycled etc)
    - Where are the places a plastic bag can end up? (landfill, in the environment, recycle bin)
- To visualise how long a plastic bag remains in the environment, get students to draw a picture of a scene with a plastic bag in it in 2003, and a scene with the same plastic bag in it, but in 1,000 years when that plastic bag will still be around (futuristic).

PLASTIC BAGS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

- It is estimated that around 50 million bags enter the Australian litter stream every year. Unless they are collected, they stay in there.
- During their life, a plastic bag can entangle and harm marine life and animals.
- Over 100,000 animals and birds die every year as a result of plastic bag litter.

Use each of the following key messages as a focus for each week of the campaign. Assist the students define the meaning of each key message and the action required.

REFUSE

Definition: Do not accept plastic bags when shopping.

How: Use an alternative to plastic bags

Activity:
1. Assist students list a range of alternatives to plastic bags including paper bags, calico bags, string bags, boxes etc.
2. Set up a display in the classroom of alternatives which the children bring from home.

REDUCE

Definition: Accept less plastic bags

How: If you only have a couple of things, then carry them in your hands – you do not need a plastic bag for a packet of lollies or newspaper
If you must use a plastic bag, make sure it is full before getting another one!
Don't put items with handles in a plastic bag ie dog food, nappies

Activity:
1. Ask students to tell their story about ways they have reduced their use of plastic bags
2. Get the students to act out scenarios, showing how you reduce.

REUSE

Definition: Use your old plastic bags for a new purpose

How: Take plastic bags back to the supermarket and use again for groceries
Reuse plastic bags to store clothing
Keep a plastic bag in your schoolbag in case you buy something on the way home

Activity:
1. Get students to put together a list of ways they can reuse plastic bags.
2. Stress that plastic bags are very strong and can be reused and reused. When they can no longer be used then recycle them

RECYCLE

Definition: Turn used plastic bags into new plastic products

How: Take your plastic bags back to any Coles, Woolworths or Bi-Lo store and put them in the recycle bin.

Activity:
1. Educate students on what can be recycled and how to recycle using the following information:

What can be recycled?

There are two main types of plastic bags used at shops:

RECYCLABLE HDPE (high density polyethylene film) used by most supermarkets as checkout bags. HDPE bags can be recycled into products such as plastic lumber, industrial bin liners, drain pipes, plastic flower pots, coats hangers, plastic envelopes and new plastic bags.

NON-RECYCLABLE LDPE (low density polyethylene film) used by some retailers and stores. Non-recyclable LDPE bags are easily identified because they are thick, heavy plastic (usually non-transparent / boutique style). Do not put LDPE bags into recycling bins as they contaminate the recyclable HDPE plastic.

How to Recycle

Identify a local supermarket that offers recycling facilities for plastic supermarket bags and use it.

Take plastic bags back for recycling next time you go shopping

Ensure that all plastic bags that are placed in recycling bins are clean and empty. Always check for receipts and remove them.

Do not put plastic bags in kerb side recycling collection, as they will end up in landfill.