

## Say NO to Plastic Bags

Plastic bags are everywhere, and while they are convenient, they cause significant environmental damage all over the world. Every year Australians consume more than 4 billion supermarket plastic bags. Of these, just 3 per cent are recycled and the rest end up in our environment or in landfill.

### The problem with plastic bags

#### Types of plastic bags

**HDPE bags** – high density polyethylene 'singlet' bags are the thinner bags used by over 80% of retailers, but predominately in supermarkets. These bags are easily recycled, yet rarely are.

**LDPE bags** – low density polyethylene bags are the much thicker bags used by boutiques and department stores. These bags are recyclable, although there are few collection points.



#### The Environmental Impact of Plastic Bags

A plastic bag on the beach, in a tree or blowing down the street is a very unattractive, yet common sight. Moreover, because plastic bags don't go away, they just break up into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic, the number of plastic bags in the environment continues to accumulate, with 80 million littered per year<sup>1</sup>.

Plastic bags are lightweight and moisture resistant, which means that they float easily in air and water, often travelling long distances.

#### Threat to Marine Life

Every year over 6 million tonnes of rubbish is dumped into the world's oceans, 80% of which is plastic, and a further 10% of this being plastic bags<sup>5</sup>. With an estimated 46,000 pieces for every square mile of ocean, plastic is responsible for killing 1 million sea birds and over 100,000 sea mammals each year<sup>3</sup>. Turtles, whales and sea birds mistake rubbish for food or get entangled in it, resulting in painful injuries, or even death.

#### Landfill Space

Australians dispose of an estimated 4 billion plastic bags, or 20,700 tonnes of plastic, that can be recycled<sup>1</sup>. Even plastic bags that are reused as bin bags end up in municipal waste streams and will never be recycled, filling our already limited landfill space.

#### Greenhouse Gases

When gas, oil and coal are used to produce plastic bags, they emit dangerous greenhouse gases. Large amounts of plastic end up in landfill, also a significant source of greenhouse gases.

#### Clean Up Costs

It is estimated that it costs governments, businesses and community groups over \$4 million per annum to clean up littered plastic shopping bags<sup>2</sup>.

#### Did you know?

- Plastic bags can be returned to your supermarket for recycling but only 3% are currently recycled<sup>1</sup>.
- So called 'biodegradable' bags actually cause greater widespread pollution than regular plastic bags<sup>1</sup>.
- Australians currently use 4 billion plastic bags annually, which means over 10 million new bags are used every day<sup>2</sup>.
- The energy consumed in the life cycle of one plastic bag is estimated to be equivalent to 13.8 millilitres of crude oil, or about a teaspoonful<sup>6</sup>.
- Australians throw away about 7,150 recyclable plastic bags a minute, with 429,000 recyclable plastic supermarket bags dumped into landfill every hour<sup>5</sup>.
- Plastic bags can become serial killers. Once a bag is ingested, the animal dies and decomposes, releasing the bag back into the environment to kill again<sup>4</sup>.





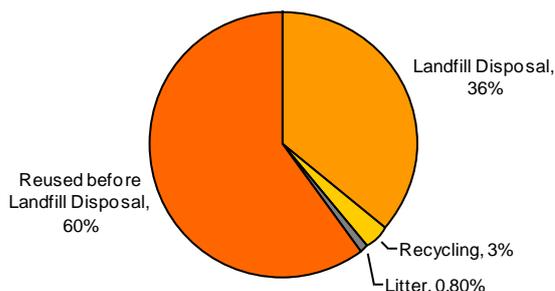
# Say NO to Plastic Bags

## The solution

### Say NO to Plastic Bags Campaign

Clean Up Australia is committed to getting rid of lightweight plastic shopping bags. "Say NO to Plastic Bags" brings individuals, the community, businesses, government and environmental groups together to **Refuse, Reuse and Recycle** plastic bags.

### Disposal of Plastic Bags<sup>1</sup>



### What you can do today

#### Refuse

- If you are buying only a few items, consider carrying them.
- When shopping, take re-useable alternatives like 'green bags', bags out of long lasting washable non-plastics or baskets with you.
- Make sure that you keep these bags in the car or put your car keys in your reusable bags at home so you don't forget them.
- Consolidate purchases into one bag rather than getting a new bag in each store.
- Remember, the thicker bags are not easily recyclable so avoid taking them, where possible.

#### Reduce

- Count the number of plastic bags that you use and aim to reduce that number each week.
- Avoid putting items with handles into a bag, eg: dog food or nappies.
- Avoid using small plastic bags as bin liners. Simply put the household rubbish straight into the bin, lay it out with newspaper first and rinse afterwards, use the rinse water in your garden.

#### Reuse

- If you can't avoid a plastic bag, reuse it to freeze food, store clothing or while walking your dog.
- Keep a spare reusable shopping bag in your handbag or wallet. Choice 2010 survey found 62% respondents use reusable bags for shopping.<sup>7</sup>

#### Recycle

- Find a local supermarket that offers recycling facilities for plastic bags.
- Return your plastic bags with the driver if your shopping is delivered.
- Ensure that your bags are free from contamination (food scraps or receipts), to aid the recycling process.
- Ask your local council if they have plans to include plastic bags in kerbside recycling.
- Remember not to put your regular recycling in plastic bags, as this disrupts the recycling process and it will end up in landfill instead.

### References

- 1) Department of Environment Australia - [Plastic Bags Marine debris](#)
- 2) Planet Ark <http://plasticbags.planetark.org/>
- 3) United Nations Environmental Program, Marine Litter: A Global Challenge [http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub\\_details\\_s.asp?ID=4021](http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub_details_s.asp?ID=4021)
- 4) The Lab, ABC's Gateway to Science, No Bag, Thanks! <http://www.abc.net.au/science/features/bags/default.htm>
- 5) South Australia, EPA – SA Pushes Ahead with Bag Ban [plastic bag ban](#)
- 6) SMH Plastic bags news, [Plastic bags join endangered list Environment Minister foreshadows ban on plastic bags](#)
- 7) Choice – [Want to be a Green shopper?](#)

