

Plastic bag facts

- ❖ Plastic bags can last up to 1,000 years in the environment
- ❖ A car can drive 115 metres on the amount of petroleum used to make one plastic bag
- ❖ More than 100,000 sea animals, including sea turtles die each year from plastic debris including plastic bags
- ❖ Governments, businesses and community groups around the Pacific spend time and money cleaning up the plastic bags that are dumped thoughtlessly.
- ❖ The easiest way to reduce the number of plastic bags is to use an alternative, the next time you go shopping, take your own bag

Tips for shopping

- ❖ Use reusable alternatives such as cloth baskets, boxes, or “green” bags
- ❖ Use reusable containers for storing and transporting food
- ❖ Carry smaller items in your hands or a shoulder bag
- ❖ Reuse bags for subsequent shopping
- ❖ Use one bag to carry your items from different stores
- ❖ Reuse bags for storage of food or clothing
- ❖ Dispose of any plastic bags thoughtfully that they do not end up as litter

Tips for retailers

- ❖ Plastic bags cost money. Why not reduce plastic bag usage in your store by asking customers if they would like a bag.
- ❖ Train staff to pack items in a way that minimises the number of plastic bags
- ❖ Monitor bag use over a given period of time as a benchmark for measuring reduction
- ❖ Offer reusable alternatives, such as cloth bags, baskets, boxes, “Green” bags.

Degradable bags

Degradable bags are a useful alternative to plastic bags, however, they still use valuable resources and contribute to environmental waste.

Degradable bags can break down into their compound materials, or degrade through light and heat into smaller pieces of plastic.

The times taken and conditions required for breakdown depend on the design and composition of the plastic.

However, degradable bags require “ideal” conditions to break down efficiently and can introduce toxins and small plastic pieces into the environment.

Paper bags

Both paper and plastic bags produce more greenhouse gases than reusable bags. Paper bags take more energy to manufacture than plastic bags and can't be reused as often. However, they break down faster and do not pose as serious a risk to marine life as plastic bags do.

The best option to reduce plastic bags is to say “no thank you!!” when you go shopping.

Developed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

Adapted from Clean up the World Plastic Bag information sheet.

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