

Bring Your Own Bag

It's an easy way to make a difference.

Almost every time we go shopping, we come out of the store with our merchandise in a paper or plastic bag. It may be more convenient to use them instead of remembering to bring our own, but what price do we pay for that convenience? Both paper and plastic bags create air, land and water pollution during resource extraction, manufacturing, transportation and ultimately in their disposal (even recycling them consumes energy and causes pollution). Bring your own bags when you go shopping. It's a simple way to make a difference.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 million barrels of oil are required to make the 100 billion plastic shopping bags used annually in the U.S. Plastic bags may consume less energy and generate less solid waste, air and water pollution than paper bags, but they do not biodegrade (they simply break down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic). Many plastic bags are found floating in the oceans where they choke, strangle and starve wildlife. Plastic bags cause over 100,000 sea turtle and other marine animal deaths every year when animals mistake them for food.

Paper bags, on the other hand, may hold more than plastic bags, are usually made with some recycled content, and are biodegradable, but their production means cutting trees and making pulp. In 1999, 14 million trees were cut to produce the 10 billion paper grocery bags used by Americans that year alone. Paper bag production delivers a global warming double-whammy. First, forests, which are major absorbers of greenhouse gases, have to be cut down. Second, the manufacturing and transportation of the bags produces greenhouse gases.

You may reuse some of the paper or plastic bags you get from the store for things around the house such as garbage can liners or picking up pet droppings, but can you use all of them? The average family accumulates 60 plastic bags in

only four trips to the grocery store. Ask your retailer to pack your merchandise in the number of paper or plastic bags that you need and then have the rest packed in your cloth bags. Each cloth bag you use has the potential to eliminate an average of 1,000 plastic bags over its lifetime. It will even pay for itself if your grocery store offers a \$.05 or \$.10 credit per bag for bringing your own bags.

Sources:

The World Watch Institute www.worldwatch.org

The Algalita Marine Research Institute www.algalita.org

The Film & Bag Federation www.plasticbag.com

Reusablebags.com www.reusablebags.com

National Geographic News

http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/09/0902_030902_plastic_bags.html



Use Less, Recycle the Rest