

# Environmental Pollution: The Harmful Effects of Plastic Bags

Every once in a while the government passes out an order banning shop keepers from providing plastic bags to customers for carrying their purchases, with little lasting effect. Plastic bags are very popular with both retailers as well as consumers because they are cheap, strong, lightweight, functional, as well as a hygienic means of carrying food as well as other goods. Even though they are one of the modern conveniences that we seem to be unable to do without,



they are responsible for causing pollution, killing wildlife, and using up the precious resources of the earth.

About a hundred billion plastic bags are used every year in the US alone. And then, when one considers the huge economies and populations of India, China, Europe, and other parts of the world, the numbers can be staggering. The problem is further exacerbated by the developed countries shipping off their plastic waste to developing countries like India. There are many harmful effects of pollution by plastic bags.

## ***How are Plastic Bags Harmful to the Environment?***

Plastic bags are used by everybody. You get them right from a vegetable vendor to a designer store. They are convenient and easy-to-use. But, most of us are blissfully of the repercussions that are occurring and will take place in the future. The following paragraphs will discuss the impact of plastic pollution on environment.

### ***Litter the landscape***

Once they are used, most bags go into landfill, or rubbish tips. Each year more and more bags are ending up littering the environment. Once they become litter, plastic bags find their way into our waterways, parks, beaches, and streets. And, if they are burned, they infuse the air with toxic fumes.

### ***Kill animals***

About 100,000 animals such as dolphins, turtles whales, penguins are killed every year due to these bags. Many animals ingest plastic bags, mistaking them for food, and therefore die. And worse, the ingested plastic bag remains intact even after the death and decomposition of the animal. Thus, it lies around in the landscape where another victim may ingest it.

### ***Non-biodegradable***

And one of the worst environmental effects is that they are non-biodegradable. The decomposition takes about 400 years. No one will live so long to witness decomposition of plastic. Thus, save the environment for the future generation of humans as well as animals.

### ***Petroleum is required to produce plastic bags***

As it is, petroleum products are diminishing and getting more expensive by the day, since we have used this non-renewable resource increasingly. Petroleum is vital for our modern way of life. It is necessary for our energy requirements - for our factories, transport, heating, lighting, and so on. Without viable alternative sources of energy yet on the horizon, if the supply of petroleum were to be turned off, it would lead to practically the entire world grinding to a halt. And to make plastic, about 60 - 100 million barrels of oil are needed every year around the world. Surely, this precious resource should not be wasted on producing plastic bags, should it?

### ***So, What Can be Done about the Use of Plastic Bags?***

Single-use bags have become such a ubiquitous way of life that it seems as if we simply cannot do without them.

However, if we have the will, we can start reducing their use in small ways.

A tote bag can make a good substitute for holding the shopping. You can keep the bag with the cashier, and then put your purchases into it instead of the usual plastic bag.

Recycling the bags you already have is another good idea. These can come into use for various purposes, like holding your garbage, instead of purchasing new ones.

While governments may be working out ways to lessen the impact of plastic bags on the environment, however, each of us should shoulder some of the responsibility for this problem, which ultimately harms us. From the above paragraphs, you must have understood the gist of the harmful effects of plastic bags on environment. They are not only non-biodegradable, but are one of the major pollutants of the sea. For a clean and green environment, try to use alternatives to plastic whenever and wherever possible. Cut down on your use of plastic, and do your bit to save our planet.

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