

What is being done to stop plastic bags?

The good news is that with public pressure countries all over the world are now banning the use of disposable plastic carrier bags or introducing taxes that really work to drastically reduce their use. In Ireland use of disposable plastic bags has decreased 95% since the Government introduced a tax on them 5 years ago. In Taiwan the Government has banned their use completely and fines of up to £1,000 can be imposed on individuals caught using one! Modbury in South Devon became the first plastic bag free town in the UK in May 2007. Here in Crediton we want to join them as soon as we get the support of the retailers and general public to do so.

So what can YOU do?

It is tempting to close our minds to all this awful information and think that whatever we do as individuals will make no difference, but this is not so.

You can help right now in the following ways:

- Share this fact sheet with your friends, relatives and neighbours and encourage them to stop accepting and using plastic carrier bags when they go shopping.
- Refuse carrier bags when you are offered them in shops and explain why to the assistant.
- Get into the habit of taking a reusable bag with you when you go out to carry home your shopping. There is a wide variety to choose from made from cotton, hemp or jute, or try a mini one made from parachute silk that will fold up and fit on your key ring!
- Support local shops that are helping. A number of shops in Crediton, stalls in the monthly Farmers Market and also the library are already selling bags made from cotton, jute and parachute silk. Also look out for places to buy compostable bin liners and dog poo bags.

- Make your own shopping bags using the pattern at www.morsbags.com and an old curtain or sheet
- Give reusable shopping bags as gifts for birthdays and use as Xmas stocking fillers.
- Sign up to our 'Supporters of a PLASTIC CARRIER BAG FREE Crediton' list.
- Petition the Government to tax plastic carriers at www.green-england.co.uk/plasticbagpetition
- Get knowledgeable by checking out some of the websites below:
- To buy ethical bags made of jute, cotton and hemp: www.turtlebags.co.uk www.thehempstore.co.uk
- To buy key ring and shoulder bags www.onyabags.co.uk www.purelyme.co.uk
- Read about Modbury, the UK's first plastic bag free town www.plasticbagfree.com
- Find out about the damage caused by plastic waste www.planetark.com www.reusablebags.com
- A short version of a BBC wildlife film about the problems caused by plastic bags in the Pacific www.messageinthewaves.com

THANK YOU FOR READING THIS AND FOR TAKING ACTION.

TOGETHER WE REALLY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By Crediton Climate Action

For information, please contact Paula on 01363 866106, or visit our website, <http://groups.google.co.uk/group/crediton-climate-action>

Produced for Crediton Climate Action by

scribble AND (non)sense

Local design and editorial support
www.scribbleandnonsense.co.uk



Plastic Bags

Some facts that may surprise you.

Plastic Bags

Some facts that may surprise you.

How many plastic bags do we use?

Each year in the UK we use between 10 and 20 billion disposable plastic carrier bags. That's up to 323 for each household which represents enough to carpet the entire planet every 6 months or stretch to the moon and back five times! They weigh a staggering 100,000 tons, equivalent to 70,000 family cars.

What happens to all these bags?

On average we use each one for just a few minutes before we throw it away. They then take up to 1,000 years to decompose in landfill sites. In fact, except for very small amounts that have been incinerated, every bit of plastic ever made still exists, and we only recycle 3% to 4% of it worldwide! Each year billions of bags end up as ugly and dangerous litter. Almost half the waste that is blown away from landfill sites is plastic bags. These end up in our countryside, rivers and streams and many ultimately travel to the sea. Amazingly an average of 46,000 items of plastic rubbish are floating in every square mile of seawater on the planet and over 80% of it originated on land. In the Pacific Ocean an area twice the size of France has now become a floating plastic rubbish dump.

Why are plastic bags dangerous to sea life?

Hundreds of thousands of sea turtles, whales and other marine mammals die every year from eating discarded plastic bags floating in the water that they mistake for food. Turtles think the bags are jellyfish, their main food source. Once swallowed the bags choke the animals or block their intestines, leading to an agonising death. Leatherback turtles around the coast of the UK are suffering this awful fate as you read this. Several years ago a dead minke whale was found on a beach in Normandy France with 800kg of plastic bags

in its stomach, including a number of bags from British supermarkets. In addition up to 1 million seabirds a year are killed by eating the plastic floating on or just below the surface of the sea.

What about land animals?

Even farm animals are affected. Recently a calf that died on a farm in the UK was autopsied and 6 plastic bags were discovered in its stomach. Once a bird or animal dies from swallowing the plastic, and its body decomposes, the plastic is then re-released into the environment to kill a second time, and a third and a fourth... The cycle is endless.

What about degradable plastic?

Many supermarkets are now making their bags of so called environmentally friendly degradable plastic. It is made from oil with chemicals added to make it break down over time, usually several years. It mainly breaks down into smaller and smaller particles of plastic, plastic dust in fact! Some recent forms of degradable plastic are claimed to break down into water, carbon dioxide and minerals, but this is not yet proven and such a process still takes a long time, during which the bags cause all the litter and environmental hazards mentioned above. Their decomposition also releases CO₂ (greenhouse gas) into the environment, possibly contributing to global warming.

What about bio-degradable and compostable plastic?

Bio-degradable and compostable bags are usually made of cornstarch and are better, as when composted they break down more quickly and into substances that can be re-incorporated into the soil and used by plants to grow. But sadly these bags do not decompose well in landfill where there is not enough oxygen for them to break down, and of course they also cause an unsightly litter problem that can damage wildlife.

Is there an answer?

Yes - The answer is to STOP USING DISPOSABLE CARRIER BAGS. Use bags made from alternatives like hemp, jute or cotton that can be used many times over and then recycled.

Is plastic bad for human health?

Not yet convinced we need to do something to stop all this? Think about your own and your children's health. Tiny particles of decomposing plastic have to end up somewhere. From landfills they are leached into streams and waterways and from there into human water sources. We may actually be drinking plastic with our tea and coffee! Almost every human on the planet now has plastic lodged in their body somewhere, but the human body was not designed to cope with ingesting plastic. Much research now available suggests that many forms of illness, including cancer, are made worse or even caused by the unknown effects of our plastic loving lifestyle.

