

## Further information

### Sources

National Plastic Bags Working Group. 2002. Plastic shopping bags in Australia. Report to the National Packaging Covenant Council. Environment Protection and Heritage Council, Canberra.

Nolan-ITU. 2002. Plastic shopping bags: Analysis of levies and environmental impacts. Environment Australia, Canberra.

Nolan ITU. 2005. Plastic retail carry bag use: 2002–2005 consumption.

Clean Up Australia. Plastic bags [information sheet] at [www.cleanup.com.au](http://www.cleanup.com.au)

### Zero Waste SA

The goal of Zero Waste SA is to eliminate waste or its disposal in landfill by encouraging South Australians to:

- reduce their consumption of resources
- reuse and recycle materials.

Visit Zero Waste SA's website at [www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au](http://www.zerowaste.sa.gov.au)



## Zero Waste SA

How many plastic bags did Australians use in 2002?

About 6 billion, yes 6,000,000,000 - that's just to carry items on one, usually very short, journey and then be thrown away, **80 million** of them as litter at a cost to the community of \$4 million.

Most of the rest end up in landfill where they take years, possibly hundreds of years, to break down.

Things have improved since then, but not enough. In 2004 we used over 4.7 billion disposable plastic bags.



## Why worry about plastic bags?

- Plastic bags can harm marine life and livestock through entanglement, suffocation or ingestion.
- Like all conventional plastics, throwaway plastic bags are manufactured from fossil fuels, a non-renewable resource.
- Plastic bag litter is unsightly and can block gutters and drains, creating stormwater problems.

## What are you doing to reduce your plastic bag use?

### Avoid

- Do not use single-use plastic bags if at all possible.
- Take reusable bags shopping. All types—cloth, woven plastic and multi-use paper bags—are better than single-use plastic bags.
- Ask your supermarket to make reusable bags available if they don't already offer them.
- Encourage everyone you know to choose reusable bags.
- Carry one or two items instead of accepting a plastic bag.
- Keep reusable grocery bags in the car or your normal carry bag so that you don't have to remember to take them every time you shop.
- Carry a small reusable bag or singlet bag folded or rolled up in your handbag or pocket for unplanned purchases.
- Don't place items out for kerbside recycling in plastic bags— it creates more plastic bag waste and increases the cost of recycling.
- Be cautious about accepting degradable plastic bags. There remains considerable uncertainty about the environmental impact of these products (see below).

### Reduce

Consolidate purchases from different counters or stores into a single bag, preferably your reusable bag. Don't double bag.

### Reuse

Reuse plastic bags for freezing food, lunch bags and storing household items.

### Recycle

Find a supermarket that takes plastic bags for recycling. Collect unwanted plastic bags in another bag or a plastic bag 'sock' and return them to the supermarket after removing all contaminants such as shopping receipts and food scraps.

Ask your council if they include plastic bags in kerbside recycling, or plan to do so.

### DO IT TODAY.

## Government action on plastic bags

Australian governments, state and Commonwealth, are considering measures to address the problems created by plastic bags. The goal is to phase out lightweight plastic bags altogether by the end of 2008. The South Australian government wants to bring an early end to the use of throwaway plastic bags and has expressed its intention to legislate to ban the bags.

Zero Waste SA has worked with local councils, schools, community groups and small businesses to make their areas 'plastic bag free'. Most metropolitan councils and many regional councils have introduced programs to help phase-out plastic bags.

Reductions in bag use since 2002 are the result of increased consumer awareness, better staff training, and the more widespread availability and use of reusable shopping bags.

## Types of plastic bags

Australian retailers use two types of plastic bags: the lightweight 'singlet' bag made of high density polyethylene (HDPE) and used mainly by supermarkets, and the thicker 'boutique' style bag made of low density polyethylene (LDPE). Nearly 90% of all bags used are the singlet type.

## Degradable plastic bags

Degradable plastic bags have been promoted as an alternative to the standard plastic shopping bags but not all bags sold as degradable actually break down to an environmentally benign form in a reasonable time. Standards Australia is developing an Australian standard for degradable bags which will allow assessment of the rate of degradation and the environmental effect of the breakdown products.

