

# Plastic Bags info sheet



Most current plastic carrier bags are made from polyethylene which is produced from ethylene gas which is a byproduct of the petrochemical and natural gas industries.

They are cheap, lightweight, resource efficient, functional, moisture resistant, strong and ideally suited to the task of safely, conveniently and hygienically transporting groceries or other goods. They are one of the most energy efficient and environmentally friendly bag materials produced today.<sup>1 2</sup>

The amount of resin used in each bag has been decreased or light weighted over time. Today's shopping bags use 75% less resin than they did 20 years ago. Each bag weighs around 6-8 grams and can carry approx 6kgs or 1000 times its own weight.

Many plastic shopping bags are reused as waste bin liners, rubbish bags, lunch bags, or as general carry bags. A survey carried out in May 2007 by ACNielsen in New Zealand said that two thirds of supermarket carrier bags are being reused.<sup>3</sup> International studies indicate this is the same in many other countries.

Conventional plastic shopping bags are 100% recyclable. They are a valuable source of energy for the recycling industry. Plastics New Zealand is working with its members and the Packaging Council to support recycling initiatives. Plastic bags represent less than 0.2% of all waste to landfill,<sup>4</sup> and make up a very small percentage of all litter; international litter statistics consistently report at less than 1%.<sup>5</sup>

Plastics New Zealand supports the 'reduce, re-use, recycle' campaign and is a signatory to the current Packaging accord.<sup>6</sup> We have been working with industry on a product stewardship document for Degradable Plastics which will be released in April.

There are many myths about the Plastic Bag; listed below are some references and websites which help to clarify the facts.<sup>7</sup>

1 For more information on lifecycle analysis of plastic bags versus alternatives go to Boustead Consulting & Associates, "Life Cycle Assessment for Three Types of Grocery Bags" 2007

2 Recyc-Quebec, November 2007

3 For more information contact NZ Retailers Association

4 Packaging Council March 30 2009 press release

5 Stats Canada, Environmental Accounts and Statistics Division, 'Sustainable trade and recovery' by Mepex Consult AS 2007

6 <http://www.plastics.org.nz/page.asp?id=637>

7 [http://www.americanchemistry.com/s\\_plastics/doc.asp?SID=6&DID=7939&CID=&VID=178&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=&specialSearch= Info Sheet Recyclable Plastic bags](http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_plastics/doc.asp?SID=6&DID=7939&CID=&VID=178&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=&specialSearch= Info Sheet Recyclable Plastic bags)  
[http://www.americanchemistry.com/s\\_plastics/doc.asp?CID=1106&DID=8390 - 18k The truth behind Irelands Plastic bag tax](http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_plastics/doc.asp?CID=1106&DID=8390 - 18k The truth behind Irelands Plastic bag tax)

[http://www.europeanplasticfilms.eu/docs/Plastic-carrier-bags-23-10-08\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.europeanplasticfilms.eu/docs/Plastic-carrier-bags-23-10-08_2_.pdf)

<http://www.myplasticbags.ca/>

<http://www.talkingretail.com/blogs/11328-the-plastic-bag-scourge-of-the-environment-or-an-alarm-bell.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/earthnews/3308601/Plastic-bag-tax-'would-increase-waste'.html>

<http://www.environment.gov.au/settlements/publications/waste/plastic-bags/pubs/analysis.pdf>

<http://www.plasticseurope.org/Content/Default.asp?PageName=openfile&DocRef=20081020-002>

<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/03/05/1204402553654.html>

PO Box 76 378  
Manukau City  
New Zealand  
Phone: +64-9-262-3773  
Fax: +64-9-262-3850  
Email: [info@plastics.org.nz](mailto:info@plastics.org.nz)  
Trade: [www.plasticsnz.com](http://www.plasticsnz.com)  
Info: [www.plastics.org.nz](http://www.plastics.org.nz)