

## Awareness Training

### The Effects of Plastic Bags on the Environment



#### 1.1. Introduction

There is no disposal method that will eliminate the problem of plastic bags. While reusing them is the first step, they are not durable enough to stand up to numerous trips to the store.

#### 1.2. Plastic Bag Litter

This litter is not biodegradable and tends to stay for long periods of time. With possibly a 1000 billion (1 trillion) plastic bags in circulation annually this can lead to a catastrophic littering problem.

#### 1.3. The Effects of Plastic Bags in Waterways

An estimated 300 million plastic bags end up in the Atlantic Ocean alone. Any hunting water mammal can easily mistake the size, shape, and texture of the plastic bag for a meal and find its airway is cut off. As one species begins to die at an abnormal rate, every other living organism in the waterway is impacted. There are then either too many or too few and changes within the environment continue to kill yet more organisms.

#### 1.4. The Effects of Plastic Bags on Land

The indefinite period of time that it takes for the average plastic bag to breakdown can be hundreds of years. Every bag that ends up in woodlands threatens the natural progression of wildlife. Throughout the world plastic bags are responsible for suffocation deaths of woodland animals, as well as inhibiting soil nutrients. It has been estimated that one bag has the potential to kill one animal every 3 months due to unintentional digestion or inhalation. Since the number of littered plastic bags can be up to 3 million depending on location, this means a lot of ecosystem-sustaining lives lost. Without the balance of the ecosystem, food sources dry up and starvation occurs.

#### 1.5. Recycling Plastic Bags

1.6. It can be expensive to recycle this type of plastic. It doesn't melt down easily and is often not realistically able to be reused from its original form without considerable improvement to the recycling facility. Less than 1% of all bags sent to recycling plants worldwide end up in the recycling project.

#### 1.7. Alternatives to Plastic Bags

**Paper bags** are a possible option but the use of trees to increase the production of paper products combined with the increased energy that is required to make paper bags have a negative environmental effect.

**Reusable plastic bags** are stronger and more durable and can be used for three to five trips to the store.

The **reusable cloth bag** is fast becoming a **favourite** among environmental supporters.