

Bags, Bags, Bags

Visually, plastic bags are a major litter problem at recycling and disposal sites as well as around town. Several communities across the country have banned the use of plastic bags and, in Alaska, a few villages have done the same. Hooper Bay pulled plastic bags from the shelves in July 2009 and Bethel will institute a bag ban in September 2010 both to combat the problem of blowing bags.

So what can you do to reduce plastic bag litter and waste? Anchorage has several options for managing plastic bags in our community to ensure that they don't become a nuisance or a danger to wildlife.



TIP: To test plastic film for recyclability, press your thumb into the film. If it stretches a little, it is recyclable. If not, or if it tears, it is not recyclable. Examples of plastic films that are *not* recyclable include cellophane, chip bags, florist wrapping, and many other "crinkly" plastics.



Shop with Reusable Bags

Keep reusable shopping bags in your car, bike bag, or backpack. If you forget to bring your bags into the store, go back to get them out of the car when you remember instead of "waiting until next time." This is a more effective way to change your habits.

If you don't have your own reusable bags, reusable grocery bags are available at many stores, including Carrs, Costco, Fred Meyer, Target and Walmart. Most are sold for less than \$1 each. But be sure that the reusable bag you purchase is durable and won't become a glorified disposable bag. Owning a few durable bags is the best way to go.

Last year, Fred Meyer stores sold 1.3 million bags, which were reused 16 million times, diverting more than 20 tons of waste from landfills. Fred Meyer customers in Alaska used approximately 800,000 fewer disposable bags in 2008 than in 2007. Part of the motivation is Fred Meyer's 5¢ per bag refund for customers who bring their own bags.

There's even a web site totally dedicated to where you can find reusable bags in local stores. <http://www.findreusablebags.com>

Reuse Your Plastic Bags

Consider reusing your plastic grocery bags as many times as possible, either for more groceries or for other tasks around the house (trash can liners, kitty litter scooping etc.). You can probably get a few uses out of your disposable bags.

Recycle Your Bags

Plastic bag recycling is back at the Anchorage Recycling Center. The bin is accessible 24/7. Most types of plastic film, including grocery bags, dry cleaner bags, clean trash bags, and any other type of film that is slightly stretchy, are acceptable. Carrs, Fred Meyer and Walmart all accept plastic grocery bags for recycling too. Bags are made into plastic lumber or new plastic bags. Plastic bags and film are not recyclable in curbside carts.

Cover Your Load

Be sure to secure your trash, whether it is in your trash can at home or in your vehicle on the way to the transfer station or landfill. Keep trash can or cart lids closed, store trash inside a structure or in secure containers, and tarp or tie down your load in transit. It's the law! Any trash that escapes is your responsibility, no matter the cause. Take responsibility, set a good example and keep Anchorage clean and safe.