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Remember the 4 R's: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Repair

A recent Scientific American article stated the world creates 260 million tons of plastic each year, and much of it winds up in the oceans. Plastic continues to accumulate in the Pacific Ocean and one of the bigger areas of trash is said to be more than double the size of Texas. Most of the trash in this island of debris has broken into bite-sized plastic bits which are sickening or killing whales and the smaller fish, plankton, and birds that ingest it.

Polyethylene was invented in the 1930s, but it wasn't used to take our groceries home until 1977. The bags were introduced as a way to increase their market share in grocery stores. The real turning point came in 1982, when the industry persuaded two of the nation's largest supermarket chains, Safeway and Kroger, to replace traditional paper bags with the much more cost-effective plastic model. For customers, the appeal could be summed up in one word: handles. Paper bags didn't get handles until the late 1990s, and by then it was too late. Plastic had taken over.

Bottle caps, bags and wrappers that end up in the ocean from the wind or through overflowing sewage systems can then drift thousands of miles. It is estimated that more than 100,000 marine mammals die trash-related deaths each year.

Is there anything that we can do about this problem? Well, we can do our part by making an attempt to **reduce** our use of plastic. It is one thing not to know the harm that this causes but once we do know shouldn't we become concerned?

What can one person do? I have made some of these suggestions before but I think that they bear repeating.

Try this for one week – count the actual number of plastic bags that come into your home. Multiply that number by 52 weeks to find the estimated number of plastic bags that you and your family use in one year.

Now multiply that number by the number of residents in the town that you live and you will start to get an idea of just how many plastic bags are around you. Next, imagine if you refused the bag each time it was offered to

you by carrying the items you have purchased in a canvas or cloth bag. You get the idea.

- Remember to take **reusable** cloth bags when you go shopping – just keep them in your car and grab them before you go into the store. Decline the plastic bag that is offered to you and take a few minutes to let the manager of the store know why you do not wish to continue using plastic.
- Shop at a local farmer’s market where produce is not in a fancy package.
- Buy fewer packaged goods. Buy loose fruits and vegetables rather than those placed on Styrofoam platters and wrapped in plastic.
- Buy from the bulk bins – most grains, beans, cereals, nuts, rice, raisins, etc, are available in bulk. It is usually cheaper and the item can be placed in a paper bag, thus avoiding cardboard boxes and plastic wrapping.
- Many fast food restaurants use paper and cardboard. Some people even take a container with them in anticipation of carrying leftovers home.

I urge you to **reduce** your use of these items. It is just a small action on your part that takes no effort at all.

Plastic does not go away - it just accumulates.

Don’t forget “Together we can make a difference.”
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