

The Truth About Plastic Bags



separating fact from fiction



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Let's Get Acquainted First

About Us

Since 2005, SharperBags has been a leader in the paper and plastic bags industry with reliable, **USA-based manufacturing**.

We are proud to provide distributors with the resources they need to grow their product line and business.

Simply put, we're in the business of **making you look good**.



The SharperBags Difference

Our Core Values



USA-Made

Eliminate overseas delays, fluctuating costs, and inconsistent availability.



Low Minimums

Enjoy short-run orders, starting as low as 100 minimum.



Innovation

Pitch top-of-the-line products to give you a competitive edge.



Fast Turnarounds

Take advantage of quick 4-7 day turnaround times.



Low Prices

Leverage everyday low prices & no set-up fees.



True or False?
**Paper bags are more
eco-friendly than
plastic bags**

Submit your answer in the Zoom chat



True or False?
**Banning plastic bags
will significantly
reduce waste**

Submit your answer in the Zoom chat



True or False?
**Oxo-biodegradable
plastic is better than
recycled plastic**

Submit your answer in the Zoom chat

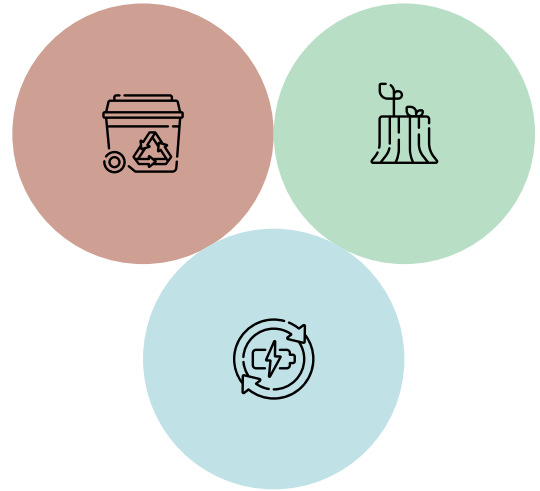


True or False?
**Post-consumer
recycled is the best
plastic bags option**

Submit your answer in the Zoom chat

Paper vs. Plastic Bags

Are paper bags really *that* much better?



Are Plastic Bags The “Modern Menace”?

It's no secret plastic bags have a bad reputation.

Americans go through hundreds of billions every year, and stray plastic bags populate our streets, oceans and landfills where they don't biodegrade and endanger wildlife.

They *can* be recycled but usually aren't.
(More on this later)



How Do They Compare Paper Bags?

While paper bags are biodegradable and easy to recycle/compost, producing them in bulk requires a lot more water, fuel and trees – **significantly increasing their carbon footprint.**

Plus, they usually aren't made from recycled material because new paper has longer, stronger fibers.



Paper vs. Plastic Bags



side-by-side comparison



	Paper Bags	Plastic Bags
Durability	Strong	Stronger
Water resistance	Can become soggy and tear	Waterproof
Reusability	Can be reused, less versatility	Can be reused over and over
Cost-effectiveness	Affordable	More affordable
Resource efficiency	Requires energy and water	Requires less energy and water
Transportation costs	Heavy and bulky, higher transportation costs and carbon emissions	Light and compact, reduced transportation costs and carbon emissions

What About Reusable Bags?

Cloth bags are typically made from cotton, which are a particularly pesticide-intensive and water-guzzling crop.

Reusable bags made from nonwoven polypropylene plastic are also common and are **less carbon-intensive to produce**, making them a more viable option.



Paper vs. Reusable Bags

While plastic bags have garnered a lot of attention for their environmental impact, it's important to consider the environmental footprint of paper and reusable bags as well.

Paper Bags

Pros	Cons
Biodegradable	Deforestation
Recyclable	High water consumption
Renewable resources	Air and water pollution
	Heavy and bulky

Reusable Bags

Pros	Cons
Reduced consumption of single-use bags	Resource-intensive production
Durable and versatile	Potential hygiene issues
Reusable	End-of-life disposal

How Does Each Bag Compare?

Two of the most important considerations for a bag's eco footprint are whether or not they are reused – and if so, *how many times*?

Compared to Plastic Bags:

- Paper bags would have to be reused **at least 3x** to negate their higher climate-warming potential.
- A cotton bag would have to be reused **131x** to break even, in terms of the climate impact production.

Of course, plastics can be reused as well — *they just might not look as nice.*



Which Bag Is the Most “Sustainable”?

The answer depends on 3 factors:

1. Material

The environmental impact of reusable bags varies depending on the material.

For example, cotton bags have a higher environmental footprint than polypropylene bags due to their water-intensive production.

Educate your clients on each material’s impact while weighing the other 2 contributing factors...



Which Bag Is the Most “Sustainable”?

The answer depends on 3 factors:

2. Frequency of Reuse

The environmental benefits of reusable bags are directly related to how often they are reused.

The more times a bag is reused, the lower its environmental impact is per use.

Ask your clients which material they think their customers will reuse the most.



Which Bag Is the Most “Sustainable”?

The answer depends on 3 factors:

3. Proper Disposal

How carefully a reusable bag is disposed of at the end of its life also plays a key role in reducing its environmental impact.

Educate your clients on how to responsibly dispose of – recycle or compost – each bag type, as they may differ.
(More on this later)



Are Plastic Bags The “Modern Menace”, Really?

Conclusion

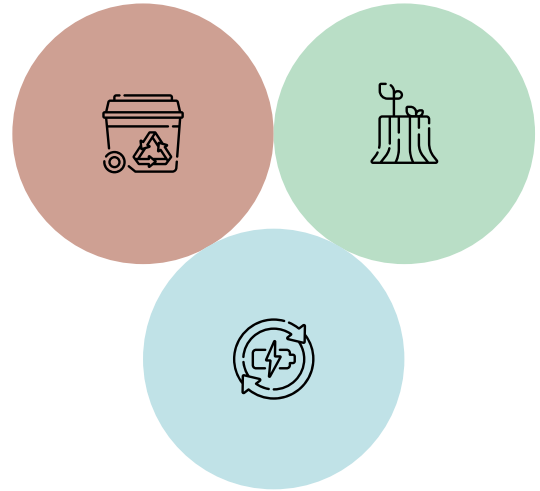
- Single-use plastic bags have the smallest carbon footprint in terms of single-bag production.
- Reusable bags offer the greatest potential for reducing waste and conserving resources when used frequently and properly disposed of.
- Paper bags can be a better alternative than plastic bags in certain situations, but their environmental footprint should not be overlooked.

Remember, material is only the beginning.
How many times they are reused and disposed of matters even more.



Plastic Bag Misconceptions

Separating fact from fiction



Debunking the Falsehoods

Myth

Plastic bags are primarily made from crude oil.

Fact

Plastic bags are mainly made from ethylene, a byproduct of natural gas extraction.



Why does this matter?

Plastic bags utilize a resource that would otherwise be burned off and wasted.

Debunking the Falsehoods

Myth

Banning plastic bags will significantly reduce waste.

Fact

Plastic bags make up a small percentage of overall waste.



Why does this matter?

While reducing their use is beneficial, it won't solve the larger waste problem. Other items like food packaging and cigarette butts contribute more to litter.

Debunking the Falsehoods

Myth

Plastic bags are difficult and expensive to recycle.

Fact

Plastic bags are recyclable in specialized facilities.



Why does this matter?

While they can't be recycled in curbside bins, many stores offer collection points for plastic bag recycling.

Debunking the Falsehoods

Myth

Paper bags are a more eco-friendly alternative.

Fact

Paper bags often have a larger environmental footprint than plastic bags.



Why does this matter?

The resources required for paper bags to be produced and the waste generated in the process significantly increase their carbon footprint.

Debunking the Falsehoods

Myth

Plastic bags are the main source of litter.



Fact

Plastic bags contribute to litter, but they are not the primary source.

Why does this matter?

Other items like cigarette butts, food packaging, and improperly disposed of trash are bigger contributors.

Oxo-biodegradable vs. Recycled Plastic

Which one is more sustainable?



Oxo-biodegradable vs. Recycled Plastic



side-by-side comparison



	Oxo-biodegradable Plastics	Recycled Plastics
Recyclability	Cannot be recycled, can contaminate the recycling stream	Can be recycled multiple times
Reusability	Designed to break down into smaller pieces with additives	Can be melted down and reformed into new products
Resource efficiency	Breaks down quicker but can harm wildlife	Conserves energy and resources compared to starting from scratch
Biodegradable	Don't fully decompose into natural substances, turn into microplastics	Not biodegradable

Which Option is More Sustainable?

Conclusion

Overall, recyclable plastics are a better option than oxo-biodegradable plastics as they can be reused and reduce waste.

Despite their ability to break down more quickly than traditional plastic, oxo-degradable plastics still ends up in landfills because they're not recyclable.

Recycled plastics divert plastic from landfills and reduce the amount of plastic waste and resource consumption.



Other Considerations

Educate your clients:

Labeling: Check the labeling on plastic products to determine if they are recyclable or oxo-biodegradable.

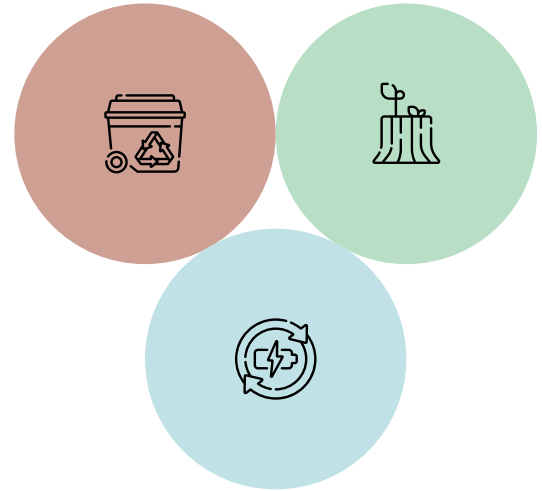
Recycling infrastructure: Not all types of plastic are recyclable in all areas. Check with local recycling facilities to see what types of plastics are accepted.

Environmental impact: Both recyclable and oxo-biodegradable plastics have environmental impacts. It's important to reduce your overall plastic consumption and **choose products with minimal packaging whenever possible.**



Recycling Plastic Bags

How to *properly* recycle plastic



Can Plastic Bags Be Curbside Recycled?

Unless you live in one of the few U.S. communities that accepts plastic bags, wraps, and films in curbside recycling, they must be taken to the store for to be recycled – no matter what the packaging claims.

If not, they get tangled up in the curbside recycling equipment, **causing problems for recyclers**. After this, they are landfilled.



Where to Recycle Plastic Bags

Plastic bags undergo a special recycling process through Store Drop-off, which can be found at any retail store with a plastic bag recycling bin.

Even if you purchased the packages online, you can still take them to any retail store with a plastic bag recycling bin.

Find a recycling drop-off center near you:

<https://plasticfilmrecycling.org/#two-column-section>



What Can Be Recycled Through Store Drop-Off?

Look for the How2Recycle Store Drop-Off label on flexible plastics made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) and low-density polyethylene (LDPE).

Certain flexible plastic packages can be recycled through Store Drop-Off locations:

- Most plastic bags, like grocery bags, produce bags, newspaper bags, zipper sandwich bags, and some cereal bags
- Most stretchy plastic wraps, like the wrap around multi-packs of drink bottles, paper towels, or diapers



Contributing To A Circular Economy

California's new law requiring 15% recycled content in plastic bags went into effect January 1, 2025, causing an uptick in requests for more recyclable content.

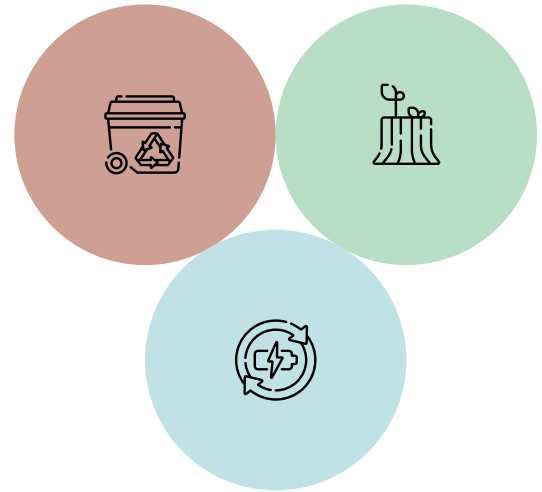
Currently **only 10% of plastic bags are recycled**, which is too low to support a circular economy—one that keeps materials moving through reuse, repair, redistribution, and recycling to preserve natural resources and minimize climate-altering emissions.

If your clients are interested in plastic bags, be sure to educate them on how to properly recycle.

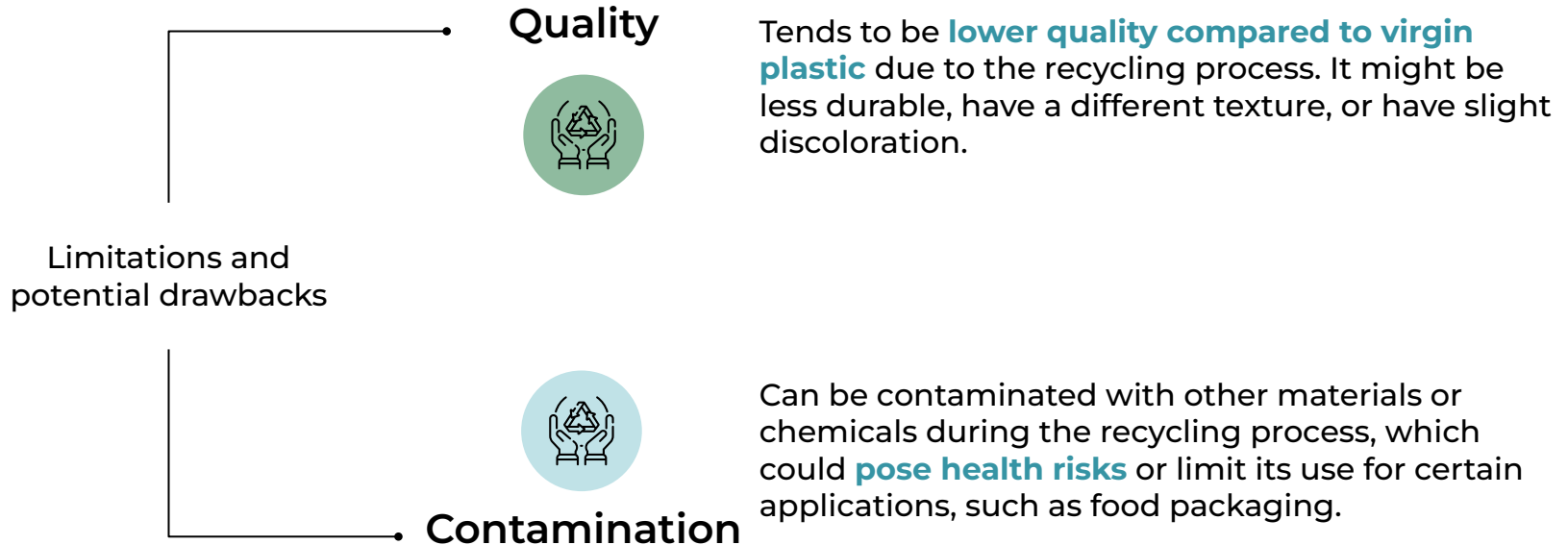


Post-Consumer Plastic

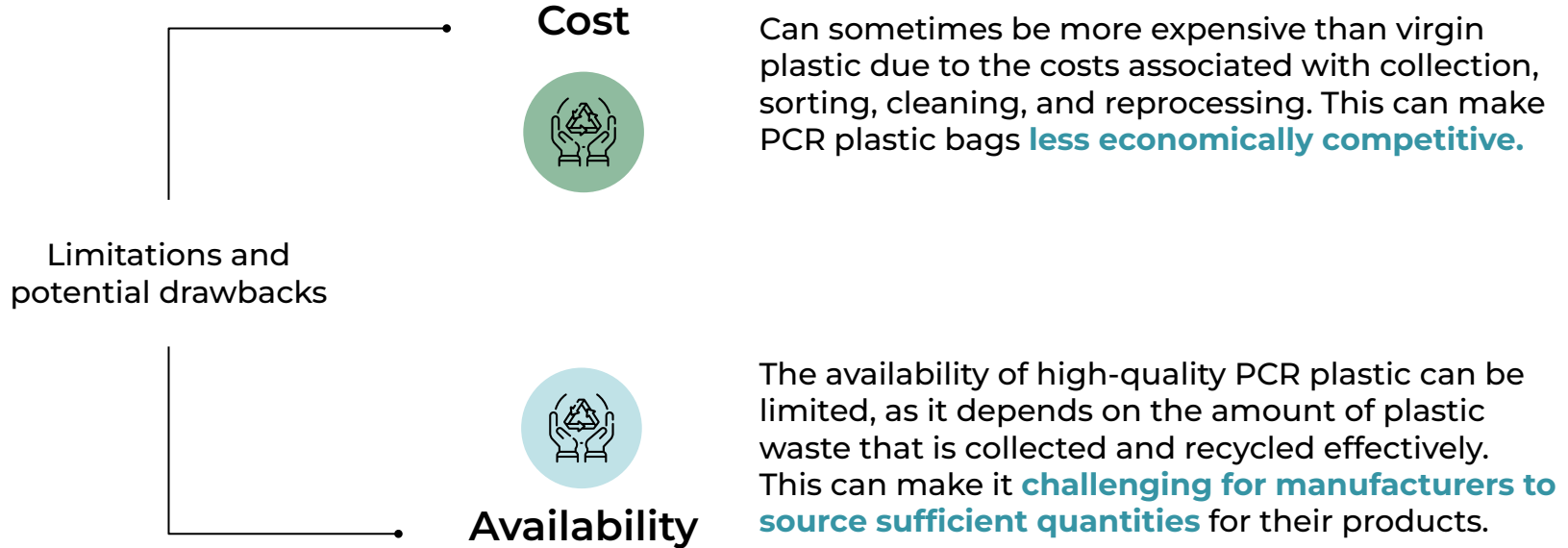
Evaluating the risks of post-consumer materials



Post-Consumer Recycled Plastic (PCR)



Post-Consumer Recycled Plastic (PCR)



Post-Consumer Recycled Plastic (PCR)



Post-Consumer Recycled Plastic (PCR)

End-Of-Life Management

Even if a plastic bag is made from PCR plastic, it still needs to be disposed of properly at the end of its life.

If it ends up in a landfill or pollutes the environment, it can still have negative impacts, regardless of its recycled content.



Is PCR Plastic More Sustainable?

Conclusion

While PCR plastic bags can offer some environmental benefits by reducing the demand for virgin plastic and diverting plastic waste from landfills, **it's important to consider their limitations and potential drawbacks.**

The quality, availability, cost, and recycling infrastructure for PCR plastic can vary, and there are also concerns about contamination and greenwashing.





Was this helpful?
**Has your view on
plastic bags changed?**

Submit your answer in the Zoom chat

Want More Info?

We are proud to offer an extensive line of **USA-made** Plastic Bags with a variety of options for your client's every need.

Choose from gusseted bottoms, handle styles and even 1 or 2-sided full-color imprint options.

Request free samples!



Thank You!

Do you have any questions?

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sharperbags.com



@sharperbags



Resources

- <https://how2recycle.info/>
- <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/home/g804/recycling-symbols-plastics-460321/>
- <https://www.ecoenclose.com/>
- <https://stanfordmag.org/contents/paper-plastic-or-reusable>
- <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/sustainable-shopping-which-bag-best/>
- <https://stanfordmag.org/contents/plastic-bags-to-recycle-or-not-essential-answer#:~:text=You're%20right%2C%20reusing%20plastic,States%2C%20according%20to%20the%20EPA>
- <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/8/20/20806651/plastic-bag-ban-straw-ban-tax>
- <https://www.ecoenclose.com/resources/composting>
- <https://www.wcibags.com/2025/02/18/truth-about-recycled-poly/>
- <https://actionhealth.com/what-are-plastic-bags-made-out-of/>
- <https://www.goodstartpackaging.com/oxo-degradable-plastic/#:~:text=Despite%20its%20ability%20to%20break,receive%20in%20a%20landfill%20setting>
- <https://erefdn.org/>