

As of last March, Westport, Connecticut, mandates that paper bags used at retail-store checkout lines must contain at least 40 percent post-consumer recycled content. (In 2008, the city was also the first east of the Mississippi to ban plastic bags.)

We recycle only 10 to 15 percent of our paper bags. Paper is the number one material found in America's municipal solid waste. (Plastics come in fourth.)

Manufacturers sometimes use aluminum sulfate, a suspected reproductive toxin, to make paper. Moreover, to give paper bags a consistent color, the factory relies on dyes which contain a mishmash of chemicals that can include chlorine, associated with the release of dangerous toxins known as dioxins.

One mature tree absorbs about 13 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Every ton of wood grown in a forest removes 1.47 tons of carbon dioxide, replacing it with 1.07 tons of oxygen.

## { Paper }

Paper bags require trees—lots of them. In 1999, about 14 million were felled to make the 10 billion grocery bags that Americans used that year.

Even switching to recycled-paper bags can make a difference. Besides saving trees, producing recycled paper creates 74 percent less air pollution and 35 percent less water pollution than producing paper from virgin materials.

Paper piled in landfills often has no access to the light or oxygen it needs to break down. When bags do biodegrade, they produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

About eight in 10 U.S. paper mills are now equipped to use paper collected from recycling programs. While most mills still rely on virgin materials, many have factored recycled material into their regular paper-grade recipes.

# Kick the Bag Habit

Yes, disposable bags are convenient, but at what cost? Learn what some groups have done to cut down on paper and plastic—and why you should B.Y.O.B. (bag) the next time you shop

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