

The Problem with Plastic Bags

Americans use more than 380 billion plastic bags a year. Utahans throw away 940 million bags a year. Despite their durability, these bags are lightweight, aerodynamic and often end up in trees, fences, rivers and storm drains contributing to millions of dollars in municipal cleanup costs. Plastic bags are also the most prevalent debris surrounding landfills. While most of the garbage that is dumped at a landfill remains in place until it is buried beneath 6 inches of dirt at the end of the day, plastic bags easily fly away and end up as litter on surrounding properties. Litter from plastic bags is so problematic that many landfills install large, curved “Jurassic Park” fences to catch airborne bags. Last year, Trans-Jordan landfill spent more than \$40,000 on litter control.

Here in Utah **plastic bags are not accepted in curbside recycling**. Do NOT bag recycling before bringing it out to the bin or place any types of plastic bags (grocery bags, sandwich bags, bread bags, etc.) in your recycling. Even if the plastic bag has a recycle symbol or claims to be recyclable, it is not accepted in curbside recycling bins.

Plastic bags wreak havoc on the automated equipment at recycling facilities by wrapping around spinning parts. Every day, machinery has to be shut down and plastic bags cut away. As recycling is sorted at our local materials recovery facility, plastic bags are removed from the recycling stream and sent to the landfills.

What can you do?

- Reduce the amount of plastic bags by remembering to take reusable bags to the store
- Reuse bags to clean up pet messes or lining your small trash cans. This will prevent the bags from becoming flying litter
- Recycle your plastic bags by returning them to the grocery store. Most stores have recycling container in the front entrance