# Stop Eating Plastic Bags

By THE BOURNE RECYCLING COMMITTEE

According to the American Chemistry Council, we should choose plastic over paper. Plastic bag manufacturing uses less than 4 percent of the water used to make paper, uses 40 to 70 percent less energy, has 1/7th the volume of paper, has 1/6th the weight and uses 91 percent less energy to recycle. Plastic grocery bags are strong, convenient and free.

Unfortunately, as convenient as they are, there are many problems with them. We use 12 million barrels of oil annually to make them, while creating chemical pollutants and releasing global warming gases. Of the 102 billion bags used in 2009, 90 percent were not recycled. Eight billion bags go into landfills, where they will take 1,000 years to degrade. Many of them end up in our waterways, often making their way to the oceans. There, they can choke or block the intestines of marine life. Eventually the plastic breaks into small pieces, which the fish eat. Plastic debris is like a sponge for toxic chemicals. They make their way up the food chain until we are eating these same fish and toxins. Plastics in general are the most common pollutant in the water. Ninety-five percent of animals washed up dead have plastic in their bellies.

Solutions? Use cloth or other durable bags. Recycle #2 plastic bags (HDPE as in grocery bags) and #4 plastic bags (LDPE, LLDPE, as in newspaper or dry cleaning bags, and MDPE, as in toilet paper and paper towel bags). In our area, Roche Brothers, Shaw's and Stop & Shop all take back the above, plus storage and freezer bags (cut off sealing mechanism) and ship them to a warehouse, where they are recycled. They should be clean and dry. Not accepted are cling wrap, frozen food, salad bags or bio-based or compostible bags. Some places have started to ban plastic bags. China banned ultra-thin bags in 2008. San Francisco was one of the first cities to ban bags in our country. Ireland reduced the use of bags by 90 percent by charging a fee. Buying items with post-consumer recycled content will help complete the cycle—expanding the recycling industry.

Some of the above information came from a documentary shown at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy on April 22. The film "Bag It - Is Your Life Too Plastic?" can be obtained to show to interested groups by contacting www.netaonline.org.