

Plastic Shopping Bags and Degradables

- Degradable plastics have been developed and continue to be developed primarily for specialty niche applications such as in the medical community for sutures, staples, pins and screws and in agriculture, for mulch films.
- Certified compostable plastic bags are a recent development and are intended for use in municipal diversion programs for organic food, yard and leaf waste.
- For decades, the industry has taken a strong product stewardship position to assume responsibility for the environmental impact of plastic shopping bags.
- On material conservation, we have re-engineered the product lightweighting it so that today's plastic shopping bag uses 75% less resin and 63% less energy in its manufacture than it did 25 years ago without compromising product quality and strength
- The use of degradable plastic bags is yet another of the many tools available for consumers. The CPIA supports the use of degradable bags when they have been independently tested and preferably certified by third party agencies that they will do what is claimed for them.
- In North America, the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI) is the certification agency for compostable bags. It certifies that the plastic bags meet ASTM D6400 standards. This ensures that the materials will rapidly disintegrate and biodegrade when composted in a commercial or municipal facility and leave no long-lasting remnants in the soil or waterways.
- In particular, CPIA supports compliance with the Canadian National Environmental Labelling Standard (CAN/ISO 14021) when environmental claims are made. Claims regarding the benefits in landfill, litter reduction and the recycling of degradable bags would have to be proved. The Canadian National Environmental Labelling Standard sets out the requirements for validating a claim.
- CPIA also endorses the position that if plastic bags are labelled compostable, or are aerobically composted along with food or yard waste, they must meet the specifications of the ASTM D6400 (the American Society for Testing Materials) and be certified by the BPI. BPI issues a

special composting logo which shows that the product meets all the requirements of the standard.

- The CAN/CSA-ISO 14021 standard has 18 specific requirements including: be accurate and not misleading; be substantiated and verified by an accredited third party; be specific as to the environmental benefit claimed; take into consideration the product life cycle; and be reassessed and updated to reflect changes that might affect the accuracy of the claim.
- The CAN/CS-ISO 14021 also provides details on the usage of eleven other environmental claims – compostable, designed for disassembly, extended life product, recovered energy, recyclable, recycled content, reduced energy consumption, reduced resource use, reduced water consumption, reusable and refillable, and waste reduction.
- Current solid waste management policies are to divert organic and compostable waste from landfill to minimize degradation in landfill sites.