

Plastic Shopping Bags and Landfill Sites

- Plastic shopping bags make up a very small proportion of landfill. In fact, if all plastic bags used in Canada went to landfill, they would make up less than 1 per cent of residential solid waste by weight (Reference: for what goes to landfill, Waste Management Industry Survey: Business and Government Sector, Statistics Canada, 2002. For the plastic bags, CPIA statistics).
- In fact, all plastic products represent between 8-13 per cent of residential solid waste in landfill. (Reference: Lunenberg, SNC Lavalin, 1999; Winnipeg, Earthbound Associates, 1998; Waste Composition CRD, Sperling Hansen Associates, 2001)
- In waste composition studies organic food and yard waste accounts for 34 per cent, and paper products 16-30 per cent (Reference: Lunenberg, SNC Lavalin, 1999; Winnipeg, Earthbound Associates, 1998; Waste Composition CRD, Sperling Hansen Associates, 2001)
- The plastics industry strongly supports the diversion of as many plastic bags as possible from landfill sites ... it endorses a 'funnel' or integrated approach including source reduction of materials, reuse, recycling, and the safe recovery of energy from waste – that results in diversion of solid waste from landfill sites.
- Countries around the world are cracking down on biodegradable material in landfill sites – European landfill policy mandates reductions in biodegradable waste: by 2016, the amount must be down to 35 per cent by weight of the waste produced in 1995. Similar strategies are emerging in Canada.
- Plastic packaging does not degrade in a landfill site . . . it remains inert and does not produce gases, such as methane – a potent greenhouse gas (GHG) that traps over 21 times more heat per molecule than carbon dioxide.
- The use of some plastic in landfill can actually be helpful. Landfills today are managed so that there is a minimum of degradation ... a process of mummification to prevent contents from leaching offsite and contaminating groundwater or from producing methane. That is why landfill experts use plastic (usually high-density polyethylene) to form the bottom liner of these sites.

- Landfill sites in Canada produced about 23 per cent of methane emissions caused by human activity in 2000 . . . but less than one-quarter of emissions were captured on site in 1999 (Environment Canada did not collect capture data for 2000)