



"Building A Stronger Community  
TOGETHER"

# Recycle This!

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## The Plastic Bag "Wars"

The August 4, 2011 issue of *Rolling Stone*, aside from having a great feature article on Larry David, contains a very informative op-ed piece on our seemingly insatiable global appetite for plastic shopping bags (page 37. RS 1136). According to the article, American shoppers use an estimated **102 BILLION plastic bags each year!** That's more than 500 per consumer! Often, the ultrathin bags ultimately end up on our beaches, clogging storm drains and sewers, and literally choke aquatic wildlife, who ingest pieces of the thin plastic, mistaking them for food. Because of these concerns, many countries have initiated new rules to reduce the use of plastic bags. The article cites China as having issued an outright ban on the bags, while many European nations and US Cities have imposed stiff fees to pay for recycling of discarded bags.

Of course, there are proponents and opponents to use of plastic bags. Proponents state that the bags are durable, waterproof, cheaper to produce than paper bags, and able to carry 1,000 times their own weight, making them perfect for the consumer. Opponents cite the negative impacts the chemicals used in the bags can have on human health and wildlife, the environment,

as well as the complications plastic bags cause in today's highly automated recycling facilities (plastic bags get caught in conveyors causing frequent facility shut downs) and the limited amount of the bags that get recycled (in 2007 the EPA estimated that only 5.2% of plastic bags were actually recycled in the U.S.).

In the end, it comes down to our personal choices. Most stores offer reusable shopping bags at a reasonable price. The same stores often provide recycling bins for the plastic bags they give out patrons. It's our choice to either recycle the bags, use reusable bags, or use no bag at all (backpacks and baskets work great too).

## Curbside Yard Waste Collection

Residential utility customers can now choose to separate out their lawn clippings, leaves, prunings, garden trimmings, and other yard debris into a 95-gallon container that is picked up twice a month for a modest **\$5.50 per month** (and a one time \$11.95 setup fee). This material is taken to a local wood recycler. *Yard trimmings can create methane gas and take up valuable space in landfills. This service provides you with an alternative method of disposal.*



**RECYCLERS TIP OF THE DAY— DO NOT** put plastic bags in your City recycle bins! Rather, they can be recycled at your local grocery store or reused pick up your dog's poo, or to pick up litter on your evening walk.

## Chronicles of the Road Warrior (the first four years)

My family and I moved to Shelton more than four years ago. I am fortunate to live within walking distance to work (1.29 miles to be exact). The first few weeks I walked, I noticed a HUGE amount of litter occupying the side of the road and decided to start picking it up. The undertaking resulted in a 30 gallon trash bag being filled every day for the first three or so months. I now walk with a plastic shopping bag (see article on the first page...reuse those bags!) and, typically, fill it up. This, I've come to realize, is the 'status quo' of items being littered along this 1.29 mile stretch of road each day. Sometimes, after a holiday weekend, one bag isn't enough and I fill up a second (or third!) plastic bag that I find (also littered) on the side of the road. I thought some readers might like to know some of my personal daily pick up "records" I've logged as I sometimes count specific items I pick up (yeah, it's pretty obsessive-compulsive, I realize) as I'm sure this correlates to all of our local roads:

**Cigarette Butts:** (by far the most prolific item littered on the side of the road): 329

**Aluminum, Glass, and Plastic Bottles:** 37 (I try to recycle all recyclables I find, if

they're not too nasty)

**Bowie Knife:** 1 (seriously! This eventually found it's way to a hunting friend of ours)

**Love Seat:** 1 (I asked our Community Service Crew to get this one as it wouldn't fit in my bag!)

**Tires:** 5 (Again, Community Service saved me on this one but I did stack them up!)

**Soiled Diapers:** 4

Remember, these are one-day "records" for a stretch of road that is picked up daily!

The reason I'm writing about litter is that all of these items, if left on the side of the road, are not only eyesores but they eventually are washed into local creeks via storm drains and swales only to make their way into Puget Sound via Oakland Bay (okay, the Bowie Knife, love seat, and tires likely would not have washed into a storm drain or creek!) and have a detrimental impact on water quality and wildlife habitat. This directly correlates to our personal purchasing choices (think packaging here) and how we handle our "waste". Pass this along to a friend.

## Compost at home with your family!



You can compost your food waste into a bin constructed of wood pallets, wire, brick blocks, or other scrap materials (really! You can do it!). But for less than the cost of these materials the City of Shelton is selling Earth Machine composters for only **\$25.00** each, to our residential utility customers. When your compost is "finished", you will be amazed that at one time it was yucky old food scraps, a dead house plant,



a matted pile of grass clippings or leaves that you layered into your bin. The finished product won't disgust you (and it doesn't smell!), it will make you feel quite proud and your plants will love it too! Try composting with your kids and introduce them to the circle of life! The City also offers compost "how to" books for \$2.00 to help you get started.

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