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# The Environmental Effects of Using Paper and Plastic Bags

According to Greentumble, "Petroleum-based plastic bags take up to one thousand years or never to break down and degrade into the earth." These are the plastic bags that you find in most grocery and shopping stores across the entire country. Therefore these bags can cause a lot of damage. There are numerous harmful things that the use of plastic bags lead to. Like polluting and hurting our environment and animals, harming us humans, and costing us extra money without us knowing.

Remember the last time you bought something at the store, and your cashier put your items in these so called "free" plastic bags. You probably just threw the bag away once you got home. What you probably didn't know, is that you actually paid for that bag. Plastic bags cost around 10-15 cents extra on your total. It may not seem like a lot or a big deal, but those 10-15 cents do add up. Anacostia Watershed Society says, "An average person uses or pays for at least seven hundred fifty plastic bags per year." That means taxpayers can pay up to 88 dollars a year on just these plastic bags. Over the years it could affect you or your family's bank accounts. Now where does this extra money for plastic bags go? According to the NC Department of Public Safety, "America uses about three hundred billion plastic bags per year, and eleven billion dollars of that tax goes towards plastic bag cleanup efforts." However our world is still very much polluted with these bags and other types of litter. So wouldn't it just be easier to stop making these bags and stop citizens from using them to slow down the pollution rates so we can start making progress on these cleanup efforts. Americans would also be saving a lot of money throughout their lifetimes with the banning of plastic bags. Plastic bags however do more to us than cost us extra money.

The pollution of plastic bags is spreading to affecting our health. Plastic bags take centuries to break down, and when they do break down these bags turn into microplastics. Microplastics are very tiny pieces of plastic that are about 5 millimeters long or less. The pollution of these microplastics in different bodies of water and landfills all over the world are causing lots of problems. According to National Geographic, "Recent studies have shown microplastic particles raining down from the sky, and polluting our air. Microplastics in the air may lead to inflammatory chemicals entering the lungs." If we got rid of plastic bags then it could reduce the chance of these microplastic particles entering our bodies just by breathing. Marine animals also often mistake microplastics as food. Us humans at the top of the food chain are also consuming these microplastics when we eat these marine animals, that's including fish. According to National Geographic, "Microplastics are small enough to pass through intestines, blood streams, and into other organs." Now scientists aren't sure exactly what these microplastics can actually do to the human body. But if it is causing such an uproar and catching scientists attention, then the effects are obviously not good. Getting rid of plastic bags would lessen the chance of having this kind of damage to our bodies. But let's not forget what else is getting harmed by these bags.

Plastic pollution is choking our environment and hurting animals to death. According to The Ocean Clean Up, "Plastic is the most common type of litter." That's including plastic bags. According to National Geographic, "8 million metric tons of plastic end up in our oceans every year. That's equal to 5 plastic bags per foot along every coastline in the world." Some of this

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plastic has sunk to the bottom, but most of it still sits on the surface of the water. Waiting for the next fish that comes along to mistake it for food. Scientists have found particles of microplastics in more than 114 aquatic animals. Some of which we eat. According to The Ocean Clean Up, "The great pacific garbage patch is the largest of the 5 offshore plastic accumulation zones in the world's oceans. It is double the size of Texas, and has over 1.8 million pieces of plastic. In terms of object count, 94% of the patch is represented by microplastics." And like what was previously stated, a lot of these microplastics do come from the breakage of plastic bags. This much plastic really hurts animals and the environment. Plastic bags floating in the ocean can cause whales, sharks, turtles, and other fish to confuse them as food and swallow and choke on them. Plastic bags can not digest, so these bags will just sit in these animal's stomachs and slowly kill them. Different bird species also mistake these bags as food, and because of how light weight these bags are, birds can also get tangled in them causing them to be unable to fly and sometimes starve, and a lot of the time it ends in death. According to Biological Diversity, "one hundred thousand animals are killed annually because of plastic bags." Getting rid these bags will save thousands of lives and prevent more marine animal extinctions.

Some people might be opposed to the idea of getting rid of plastic bags. Using paper bags would cost more money to make and that would also result in the loss of more trees. According to The New York Times, "Plastic bags cost 1 penny to make, compared to paper bags which cost 4 to 5 cents to make." Scientists have also figured out that 14 million trees are cut down annually to make these paper bags. That's not any better for the environment either. The best choice would be to use reusable bags. People can buy their own reusable bags and bring them to the stores to use in place of plastic and paper. Reusable bags last longer, are bigger to fit more items in, and are better for the environment to make and use. We would just have to adapt to the new lifestyle without plastic bags and remember to bring our reusable bags places.

Getting rid of plastic bags would be very beneficial with a lot of things. We would save more money, improve our health for the future, and overall would save thousands of animal's lives. Other countries around the world and other states in America is already ahead of us and have already banned plastic bags. More people need to learn the importance of getting rid of these bags and need to start doing something about it.