



FAQs

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THE FULL CIRCLE RECYCLING INITIATIVE: *Industry Announces Program to Support Recycled Content in Plastic Bags*

U.S. plastic bag manufacturers have announced support for efforts to help “close the loop” by promoting the recycling of used plastic bags and wraps into new plastic bags. Through “The Full Circle Recycling Initiative,” plastic bag manufacturers have set an aggressive goal of 40 percent recycled content (25 percent postconsumer) by the year 2015.

1. Why are bag manufacturers making this commitment?

Though plastic bags are currently an environmentally responsible choice at the checkout – they require 70 percent less energy, generate 50 percent less greenhouse gas emissions and create 80 percent less waste than paper alternatives – when consumers and stores choose to use recycled content bags, they can help further reduce energy, greenhouse gas emissions and waste, and provide a new market for recycled plastic bags at a critical time for the economy. Through this initiative, plastic bag manufacturers are not only making a more environmentally sustainable product, they are helping to make these sustainable products more readily available to retailers and consumers who want to use them. A recent national survey found that nearly 80 percent of consumers would prefer to use plastic bags made with recycled material.

2. How will The Full Circle Recycling Initiative help to conserve resources and reduce environmental impacts?

When the initiative reaches its goal (in 2015), plastic bag makers will recycle about 470 million pounds of material, including 300 million pounds of postconsumer plastics. Postconsumer recycling will further reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 463 million pounds per year and reduce waste by nearly 300 million pounds per year. In addition, this effort will save enough energy (mainly natural gas) to heat over 200,000 homes per year. In the United States, plastic bags are made primarily (80 percent) from domestic natural gas.

3. How will this initiative work?

Plastic bag manufacturers are working with retail, nonprofit, and government allies to support programs aimed at increasing the collection of plastic bags and product wraps for recycling and to promote the use of recycled content in plastic bags. Individual company participants in the program can express support in a variety of ways, and aggregate investment is expected to reach nearly \$50 million. Some bag manufacturers already have started making bags with recycled content; others may start later this year. Retailers can help by asking for bags with recycled content or making these bags available to their customers.

4. Which retailers are supporting this initiative?

The retail interests that have announced their support for this effort to date include: Walgreens Co., Publix, the Food Marketing Institute, the Arizona Retailers Association, the California Retailers Association, the Illinois Retail Merchants Association, the Ohio Grocers Association, and the Texas Retailers Association. In addition, several major retailers and grocers recently started using recycled content bags.



5. Which plastic bag manufacturers have committed to this effort?

- API Enterprises Inc.
- Hilex Poly Company
- Superbag Operating LTD
- Unistar Plastics, LLC

6. What will bags with recycled content look like and when will we start to see them?

Recycled content bags look somewhat different from traditional white shopping bags. These next-generation bags will have a more green, buff or gray color, and manufacturers or retailers can choose to indicate the recycled content on the bag itself. Look for more of these bags in stores over the next several months.

7. How will participating companies reach their goal?

To reach their goal of 40 percent recycled content, participating plastic bag manufacturers are expected to purchase or collect over 470 million pounds of recycled material, or the equivalent of 36 billion plastic bags, annually.

8. How much plastic material from bags and product wraps is currently being recycled?

In 2007, the most recent year for which complete data are available, the amount of plastic bags and wraps recycled in the United States reached a record high of 830 million pounds, an increase of 27 percent from just two years prior.

9. How will manufacturers promote increased recycling of plastic bags and product wraps?

For the last three years, plastic bag manufacturers have been working with grocers, retailers and state and local governments throughout the country on programs to support increased collection and recycling of plastic bags and product wraps (also known as plastic film). These programs enable consumers to bring back their used materials to participating stores so they can be recycled. Examples of these efforts, including tools and information, are available at www.plasticbagrecycling.org. Through the Progressive Bag Affiliates (PBA) of the American Chemistry Council, which represents major manufacturers and recyclers of plastic bags and plastic resins, the industry will increase its efforts to enhance existing programs and establish new ones.

10. Beyond recycling, how do the Progressive Bag Affiliates help to reduce the waste associated with plastic bags?

PBA strongly supports a comprehensive approach to reducing bag waste based on the proven reduce-reuse-recycle model. This includes promoting a combination of reusable shopping bags, proper bagging techniques to help eliminate the use of excess bags, the reuse of plastic bags after shopping, and the recycling of plastic bags that are not reused. Moving forward, we will continue to promote all of these practices in addition to individual company commitments to make more bags available with recycled content or to offer bags with recycled content to their retail customers. Of course, recycled plastic bags and wraps also can be used to make other products, such as durable backyard decks, other building and construction products, and shopping carts.

11. How will you measure progress toward this goal?

Manufacturers will benchmark their progress in two ways. First, the national plastic bag and film recycling survey will be expanded to include the major manufacturers of plastic bags. The *Post-Consumer Recycled Plastic Bag and Film Report*, currently conducted by Moore Recycling Associates of Sonoma, California, compiles recycling rates from major domestic and export recyclers, and makes this information publicly available. Participating manufacturers welcome this opportunity to track their progress and promote the transparency of their operations. Second, participating manufacturers and retailers can label their bags to show the amount and kind of recycled content – and we think most program participants will be proud to do so. So, the bags will speak for themselves.



About the Progressive Bag Affiliates

The Progressive Bag Affiliates of the American Chemistry Council promotes the responsible use and recycling of plastic bags. The PBA recycling toolkit is being used by retailers around the nation as a reference for determining the best ways to deploy effective recycling solutions in stores. For more information, please visit www.plasticbagrecycling.org.

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