

## **Environmentalists call for strict ban on plastic bags**

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Mumbai: Young environmentalists from suburban Powai are planning to encourage schoolchildren to make cloth bags for their mothers and neighbours this summer vacation to help spread the message of saying no to plastic bags.

Several attempts to tax or ban plastic bags have failed not only because of opposition from manufacturers and traders but also because "it is so easy to simply ask for and use plastic bags from the shopkeeper and not feel guilty about contributing to our planet's degradation", said Elsie Gabriel, president, Young Environmentalists Programme Trust.

Mumbai cannot afford to forget how plastic bags were a major reason for choked drains and flooding during the torrential rains of July 2005 that claimed nearly a thousand lives, she said.

"That is why our Trust has invited Mumbai's Mayor Dr Shubha Raul to visit Powai Lake, where a civic beautification project is under way, to ask her to put in place a stringent ban on plastic bags before this year's monsoon," she added.

The environmentalists live close to the Mithi River and the Powai Lake and feel it is time "our children are taught to love and conserve nature through our own actions. Therefore, it is time we stopped using plastic bags for shopping," said Gabriel. In creating awareness among the youth, the Trust takes children on field trips which include lion safari, nature treks, mangrove tours, lake ecology and rain water harvesting to get a first hand knowledge of environmental science, a subject that has been made compulsory in schools.

"What better way for stressed out students to bond with nature and experience its beauty and tranquillity," said Gabriel who is a nature artist, a full-time social worker and photographer.

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