

100 billion plastic bags used annually in the US

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12 million barrels of oil are used to make the 102 billion plastic bags that are used in the United States and about 2,480,000 tons of plastic bottles and jars are disposed of annually around the world.

These are among some of the disturbing facts that were unveiled in the American documentary „Bag it“, which provoked a lively debate when it was screened at the Vrije Universiteit in Brussel, Thursday 17 October. The film screening, one of UNRIC's monthly CINÉ-ONU film-debates, this time in collaboration with the [Green-Up Film Festival](#), was followed by a panel discussion of UN specialists and environmental campaigners.

In „[Bag It: Is your life too plastic?](#)“, "everyman" Jeb Berrier, navigates through the plastic world of modern western societies. He looks beyond plastic bags and discovers that virtually everything in modern society is made with plastic or contains potentially harmful chemical additives used in the plastic-making process.

"Think about it, why would you make something that you're going to use for a few minutes out of a material that's basically going to last forever, and you're just going to throw it away. What's up with that?", Jeb Berrier asks in the film.

The film quotes Achim Steiner, the Executive Director of UNEP as „urging the world-wide ban on pointless thin film plastic bags.“

In the panel discussion after the film, Chris Vanden Bilcke, Head of UNEP's liaison Office to the EU pointed out that when a man of Dr. Steiner's stature, as Under-Secretary-General of the UN and chief of its Environment Programme, went

so far: "His statement is on firm ground, and founded on science," Mr. vanden Blicke said.

In [a report](#) issued on World Ocean Day, 8 June 2009, UNEP and Ocean Conservancy brought to the surface the growing global problem of marine litter, which is harming oceans and beaches worldwide.

"Some of the litter, like thin film single use plastic bags which choke marine life, should be banned or phased-out rapidly everywhere—there is simply zero justification for manufacturing them anymore, anywhere," Steiner, the UNEP Executive Director said. "Other waste can be cut by boosting public awareness, and proposing an array of economic incentives and smart market mechanisms that tip the balance in favor of recycling, reducing or re-use rather than dumping into the sea."

Also participating in the panel debate on the film by Suzan Beraza were Hadelin De Beer, from the Green Party in Louvain-la-Neuve and Joan Marc Simon, the Executive Director of the organisation Zero Waste Europe. The debate was moderated by Árni Snævarr of UNRIC.

(Photo of panelists: Johanna Lillqvist/UNRIC)

Here are some tips, which according to "Bag it up" can contribute to less use of plastic bags:

A LIFE LESS PLASTIC—TEN ALTERNATIVES

CARRY REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

Whether you're shopping for groceries, clothes or electronics, be sure to bring along the reusable bag(s) of your choice. Keep them in your car so you don't forget to use them.

GIVE UP BOTTLED WATER

By drinking your water from a glass jar or a reusable bottle, you can help reduce the environmental costs associated with producing bottled water and save money while you're at it.

SAY NO TO PLASTIC PRODUCE BAGS

Bagging your produce is generally unnecessary. If you do want a separate bag for produce, cloth options are available.

BUY FROM BULK BINS

You can find almost all dry foods, as well as some personal care products, from bulk bins. If you can't find bulk bins in your neighborhood, you can still buy non-

perishable goods in large packages, which will decrease the amount of plastic used.

MAKE YOUR OWN SOFT DRINK

When it comes to carbonated drinks, you can avoid the need for purchasing disposable bottles by making your own soft drink.

PACK FOOD IN REUSABLE CONTAINERS

Bring reusable containers to restaurants to take home your leftovers. Ask the butcher or deli server at your grocery store to package your food in your reusable container. Use them to pack your lunch, and don't forget to carry along reusable utensils.

CHOOSE MILK IN RETURNABLE GLASS BOTTLES

Many communities have local dairies that provide milk in returnable glass bottles rather than plastic or plastic-coated cardboard.

USE BAR SOAP AND SHAMPOO

Make the change from liquid to bar shampoo and soap!

CHOOSE LOTIONS AND LIP BALMS IN PLASTIC-FREE CONTAINERS

Organic Essence is packaging its body lotions in compostable cardboard jars and its lip balms in ingenious cardboard tubes that squeeze from the end. Or you can even make your own products.

MAKE SURE YOUR PERSONAL CARE PRODUCTS ARE PHTHALATE-FREE

Phthalates, which are plasticizers, have become standard as additives to scented products because they help fragrances last longer. But research has shown reasons to be concerned about the impact of phthalates on our health .