

## Plastic bags by the numbers

Some countries are cracking down on the use of plastic bags. Here's a look at the issue:

- About 500 billion to 1 trillion plastic bags are used worldwide every year, according to Vincent Cobb, founder of [reuseablebags.com](http://reuseablebags.com).
- Countries that have banned or taken action to discourage the use of plastic bags include Australia, Bangladesh, Ireland, Italy, South Africa and Taiwan. Bombay, India, has also banned the bags and legislation was recently introduced in Scotland.
- Australians were using nearly 7 billion bags a year and nearly 1.2 billion bags a year were being passed out free in Ireland before government restrictions, according to government estimates.
- Plastic industry trade associations were unable to provide estimates of plastic bag use in the United States. However, based on studies of plastic bag use in other nations, the environmental group Californians Against Waste estimates that Americans use 84 billion plastic bags annually.
- The first plastic sandwich bags were introduced in 1957. Department stores started using plastic bags in the late 1970s and supermarket chains introduced the bags in the early 1980s.
- About 100,000 whales, seals, turtles and other marine animals are killed by plastic bags each year worldwide, according to Planet Ark, an international environmental group.
- Overall, the U.S. plastics and related industries employed about 2.2 million U.S. workers and contributed nearly \$400 million to the economy in 2002, according to The Society of the Plastics Industry.