

## **The Effects of Plastic on the Environment – A Resource Guide**

The first plastics were invented more than a hundred years ago, but in the last fifty years plastics have begun to be an everyday part of life for most people around the world. How many times each day do you use something made from plastic?

Many plastic inventions are helpful to humans, but when plastic gets thrown away it hurts our environment.

### **Did you know. . .?**

- Plastic bags do not biodegrade, or decompose, like other items. They photo-degrade, or break down in the sunlight into smaller pieces, but never completely go away.
- A plastic bag can take between 400 to 1,000 years to photo-degrade into very small pieces.
- The world's oceans continue to fill with plastic trash, and about 80% of that trash comes from on land.
- At least 267 different marine species are known to have suffered from our litter, most of which is plastic.
- Every year, Americans use approximately 102 billion plastic bags, but only about 2% of those bags get recycled.

### **What can YOU do?**

- Pack your school lunch in a sack that you can use over and over, and use containers or cloth instead of plastic bags or plastic wrap.

- If a recycling bin isn't around, don't throw a recyclable item away. Hold on to it or tuck it in your bag until you find a place to recycle it.
- Remember to bring your own bags when you go shopping so you do not have to take new ones.
- Choose to buy things that come in glass, metal, cardboard, or recyclable packaging—or better yet, no package at all!
- Learn where your city's recycling center is, and what can and can't be recycled there.
- Share great stories and ideas (like Isatou's) with others so we can all learn how to pitch in and make our world more beautiful!

**Log On and Learn:**

Find facts about plastic from the Environmental Protection Agency:

<http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserva/materials/plastics.htm>

Discover & join in young people's earth-friendly efforts at this United Nations

Environment Programme website:

<http://unep.org/tunza/children/>

Watch Isatou Ceesay's online video about how to make your own recycled plastic bag

purses:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zZw7yrI22M>