

Shrink wrap those costs

Agricultural pipes and film for builders or plant nurseries are among the products that can be created from old plastic film and bags.

By sending off your old plastic wrap and used bags for recycling, your business could cut its waste disposal costs and help the environment.

Plastic film is thin, normally clear and tends to be used for a relatively short time. It is used to protect items from moisture and dust and includes everyday items such as plastic bags and shrink-wrap. Among typical businesses that use large quantities of plastic bags and shrink-wrap are warehouse or distribution centres, industrial plants and large retail stores.



Photo: Phil Molyneux

The benefits of recycling plastic

Making plastic is an energy intensive process and so a significant amount of energy and valuable petrochemicals are locked into the material. Reusing old plastic saves 80 to 90 per cent of the energy that would be required to make the same item from virgin materials¹.

Most plastics are not biodegradable and when sent to landfill can take many years to break down. Plastic is a major contaminant in our cities, in waterways and in the ocean.

There is a wide range of plastics and not all can be recycled the same way. The Plastics Identification Code categorises seven different types of plastic based on the resin used². It makes it easier to identify and separate different plastics so they can be recycled into new products.

Plastic film or bags are typically made from low density polyethylene LDPE or high density polyethylene HDPE. But a number of the other plastic types can also be made into films.

Simple ways to cut plastic film costs

Think in terms of the waste hierarchy. How can you avoid, reduce, reuse or recycle plastic film?

- Avoid** → **Do we need it?**
- Reduce** → **Do we need so much?**
- Reuse** → **Can we use it again?**
- Recycle** → **Can someone else use it or convert it into something new?**

¹ Bureau of International Recycling, (2010), <http://www.bir.org/industry/plastics/>

² Plastic Identification Codes, (2010), <http://www.pacia.org.au/Content/PIC.aspx>



AVOID

Find out if your suppliers can ship materials in returnable pallet containers (pallecons) or purchase reusable cargo nets to contain goods during transport.

Consider whether it is essential to shrink-wrap items like clothing, newspapers, crockery or hardware. Until recently, very few items were shrink-wrapped.



REDUCE

Work with your suppliers and customers to reduce the amount of plastic bags and shrink-wrap. Encourage customers to bring reusable shopping bags.

Determine the optimum plastic film strength and capability you need for products by talking to your suppliers.

Consider buying or renting an automatic shrink-wrapping machine if you use a lot of plastic film. These wrap pallets tightly and save money by using less plastic film.

- Discuss with your suppliers how to reduce the number of products that are wrapped or double wrapped.
- Demonstrate to staff how to make use of the least amount of plastic film, while still ensuring the integrity of products for storage or sale.
- Consider reducing the total number of different types of plastic that come into your business when ordering new products. You can identify the different categories through the plastics code. Reducing the number of plastic types used involves a bit of effort but will simplify the recycling process.



REUSE

Where practical, consider the use of reusable shipping containers such as plastic bins, totes, crates or palletised containers to transport goods from your business. These are often considered better at protecting shipped goods.

Reuse plastic bags within your business for short term storage.



RECYCLE

Visit BusinessRecycling.com.au to find local recycling service providers for different types of plastic. The site allows you to search for the nearest plastic wrap or plastic bag recyclers.

You will achieve the best possible recycling outcomes and lowest collection charges by training staff and cleaners to use the recycling system. Their involvement will determine the success of any recycling and savings program.

Find out from your plastics recyclers the type of plastic they want and how it should be prepared in order to get the best value for your clean, separated plastic.

Here are some more tips:

- Ask your service contractor to provide staff training and signs for bins.
- Demonstrate to staff how best to recycle plastic film.
- Consider investing in a bailer if your business generates or discards a lot of plastic film. Cleaned, sorted and baled plastic has greater value.
- Avoid contamination in bins and put up clear signs.
- The best return comes through separating the various plastic types based on the plastic code. While this may require the use of extra bins for dedicated plastic recycling the advantage is that your business may not have to pay for collection.

For further information

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