



## Environment Matters – 27th April 2007

### Welcome to Aardvark's fortnightly environmental news briefing, this week a 'Plastics Special'

- **Netregs Packaging** The European Commission has set targets for member states to recover and recycle packaging waste. By 31 December 2008, at least 60% of the UK's packaging waste must be recovered, and 55-80% must be recycled. ([Environment Agency – Netregs](#))
- **BPI acquisition to bring boost to farm plastics recycling** Plastics processing company BPI looks set to increase the amount of agricultural plastics it recycles by 25%, following its takeover of a washing and recycling plant in South Wales. ([letsrecycle.com 24/03/07](#))
- **WRAP test new WEEE plastic technology** Research unveiled by the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) has found that separation and treatment to remove additives from waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) can be more commercially and environmentally beneficial than landfill. ([MRW 23/04/07](#))
- **Call for better information on household plastic recycling** Local government leaders and plastics reprocessors have called for better information to be given to the public about which types of plastic packaging they cannot put in their recycling bins. ([letsrecycle.com 19/04/07](#))
- **Compostable plastic containers launched to meet demand** Over the past five years packaging suppliers have been introducing forms of biodegradable plastics made from a variety of plants, based on projections that consumers and recycling regulations will drive demand for environmentally-friendly packaging. ([packwire.com 20/04/07](#))
- **Making Plastic With Vitamin C or Water** Two laboratory breakthroughs are poised to dramatically improve how assembling molecular chains more quickly and with less waste makes plastics. Using Vitamin C or pure water, the two approaches present attractive alternatives to the common plastic manufacturing technique ([Tree Hugger](#))
- **New Plastic Solar Cells Mimic The Veins In Tree Leaves** Researchers at Wake Forest University say that they have achieved record efficiency for organic or flexible, plastic solar cells by creating "nano-filaments" within light absorbing plastic, similar to the veins in tree leaves. ([megaefficient.com](#))

### Latest News from the Aardvark Team

- Following the Aardvark team's month long initiative to reduce their generation of plastic waste this extended edition of Environment Matters explores the global issue of plastic waste generation and the use of plastic in the future. It's not all negative as the news items and fact sheet on the following pages show.
- For the latest Aardvark news logon to [www.aardvarkem.co.uk](http://www.aardvarkem.co.uk)

### And finally,

- **Sainsbury's gives away free 'Bags for Life'** Sainsbury's has announced its first Make the Difference day, scheduled for today, Friday 27 April 2007. Sainsbury's new campaign is designed to 'encourage positive action and change across a range of environmental and ethical issues,' according to the retailer. ([talkingretail.com 19/04/07](#))



## Plastic – Friend or Foe

Plastic is an every day material that most of us do not even hesitate to throw away. There are about 275,000 tonnes of plastic used every year in the UK alone and many families throw away about 40kg per year, which could otherwise be recycled.

Looking back at a trial that was run by the BBC in 2003 on plastic packaging, there has been no improvement in the amount of plastic packaging used for everyday items such as groceries.

The Aardvark team were set the challenge to give up plastic that cannot be recycled. For 40 days the team were to only buy and use plastic that we can take to be recycled in our locality.

This was harder than we imagined, some of the experiences and comments from the team are as follows:

*“I went to the supermarket and used the paper mushroom bags for all my fruit and veg. The checkout staff were not very happy and called the manager over”*

*“The office soon realised that reducing their plastic affected day to day matters such as the purchase of packets of biscuits”*

*“The unnecessary generation of plastic waste in food packaging was no more evident than when free trade bananas were sold in a plastic bag”*

*“It was noticeable at the end of the month that our waste generation was significantly reduced in the absence of plastic and in particular food packaging”*

### **What is Plastic? (The science bit)**

Plastic covers a range of synthetic or semi-synthetic polymerisation products. They are composed of organic condensation or addition polymers and may contain other substances to improve performance or economics. There are few natural polymers generally considered to be "plastics" e.g. wax or rubber. Plastics can be formed into objects or films or fibres. Their name is derived from the fact that many are malleable, having the property of plasticity.

### **How much we recycle?**

In 2001 a survey showed that out of all the material that was recycled, plastic was recycled the least. Paper was the most common at 52% then glass at 42% then cans at 29% with plastic at only 22%. In the survey people were asked the reasons for not recycling, the answers given included:

- A lack of time
- No kerb-side collections
- Recycling facility too far away
- Lack of storage space

**April 2007**

## Plastic – Friend or Foe

### What can make a difference? – Ten Top Tips for reducing plastic waste

1. Choose goods with minimal packaging
2. Reuse plastic bags until they are unusable and then recycle them at your local supermarket
3. Don't throw away unwanted plastic items e.g. toys. Donate them to charity or give them away.
4. Buy products that are refillable.
5. If buying fruit and vegetables, try to use paper bags rather than plastic ones or if possible don't have any bag at all.
6. Look for products that are made from recycled plastic.
7. Buy products that come in plastic bottles in larger sizes to reduce the packaging. (e.g. laundry liquid, soft drinks)
8. If at a supermarket use a box instead of bags for your heavy items.
9. Buy concentrated goods to minimise packaging.
10. Look out for biodegradable plastic not degradable plastic as this is more eco friendly as it totally breaks down rather than into smaller pieces of plastic.

### Types of plastic

There are about 50 different groups of plastics, with hundreds of different varieties. All types of plastic are recyclable, but most local councils do not recycle all plastics as they do not have an identified end use for them. In Somerset, for example, plastic with the numbers 1, 2 or 3 can be recycled. Other plastics can be recycled but you may have to send them away.



PET

**Polyethylene terephthalate** - Fizzy drink bottles and oven-ready meal trays.



HDPE

**High-density polyethylene** - Bottles for milk and washing-up liquids.



PVC

**Polyvinyl chloride** - Food trays, cling film, bottles for squash, mineral water and shampoo.



LDPE

**Low density polyethylene** - Carrier bags and bin liners.



PP

**Polypropylene** - Margarine tubs, microwaveable meal trays.



PS

**Polystyrene** - Yoghurt pots, foam meat or fish trays, hamburger boxes, protective packaging for electronic goods and toys.



OTHER

**Any other plastics** that do not fall into any of the above categories. – Example: Melamine, which is often used in plastic plates and cups.