

No Comparison with Italy

200,000 tons of plastic bags are discarded in Italy each year. That corresponds to one quarter (!) of all the plastic bags used throughout Europe. In addition to this quantitative difference to Austria, Italy also lacks a sufficient collection infrastructure (in Austria: yellow lid bin, yellow bag) and the capacities necessary for the environmentally friendly recycling of plastic bags. Austria, on the other hand, stands out with its high recycling rates and is an international leader in waste collection and recycling.

Why do so many consumers choose to use plastic bags?

Plastic bags have practical advantages:

- They are strong and tear resistant (they can carry a lot)
- They are weather and moisture resistant
- They can also be used as garbage bags (saves the price of purchasing your own garbage bags)

Plastic bags are not only used to help carry things, but also in other areas of life, such as

- in the kitchen (e.g. as freezer bags, ice cube bags, storage bags)
- for the disposal of animal feces
- in the medical field (e.g. as blood bags)

Freedom of Choice Instead of Legislative Decision

The Austrian companies respect the wishes of the consumers. The customer is king, and they decide what type of bag they want to use. They can bring their own bags or choose to use one of the various types of bags offered at the store (plastic, paper, etc.).

Austrian businesses see the further technical development of bags positively, and they also continually implement new ideas on their own. Legislative regulations, on the other hand, inhibit the innovative power of the Austrian companies and limit the freedom of choice for the consumers.

Austrian businesses offer a choice, and the consumer is free to decide.



The Austrian Federal Economic Chamber in cooperation with the
Crafts and Trades Division and the
Commerce Division

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The Truth about Plastic Bags

The most common myths and why they are false



The Truth about Plastic Bags

1. Myth

“Plastic bags are a senseless waste of petroleum.”

The plastic bag (i.e. petroleum in the form of plastic) is used several times in different ways: as a shopping bag (ideally re-used often), frequently as a garbage bag, and finally as recycled material, which in turn is used in the production of new bags or other products, thus returning to the material cycle. In waste incineration, the plastic bag, with its high calorific value, also helps to supply homes with district heating and to generate electricity.

Thus, with the plastic bag resources are not wasted, but used efficiently. Furthermore, re-using the bags helps to reduce waste. Not to mention, the percentage of the overall petroleum consumption used for plastic bags is incredibly small.

2. Myth

“Plastic bags harm the environment and spoil the nature in Austria.”

In Austria, plastic bags are properly recycled and disposed of. The incredible discipline of Austrians regarding waste collection and the excellent quality of the Austrian collection and recycling infrastructure guarantee a high environmental standard. In Austria, it is extremely rare for used plastic bags to be carelessly thrown away (littering). Of course the willingness of the population to collect waste can still be increased somewhat.

Legal measures restricting plastic bags are not what are needed to effectively combat littering, but rather the contribution of each and every individual. The environmental awareness of everyone is what is called for.

Not to mention, changing to other packaging materials would do nothing to stop littering. After all, anyone who carelessly throws away plastic, would do the same with other packaging.

3. Myth

“Plastic bags are not biodegradable and therefore pollute the nature in Austria.”

In Austria, plastic bags are collected and disposed of nation-wide in an environmentally friendly manner. Under these circumstances not being biodegradable is not a disadvantage.

On the contrary: Not being biodegradable means a long material life, which enables both reuse and recycling through several cycles. Durable products are environmentally desirable.

4. Myth

“Plastic bags from Austria pollute the oceans.”

Plastic bags have no place in the ocean, or anywhere else in nature. Unfortunately, in some countries plastic bags or parts of plastic bags still pollute the oceans. However, this unfortunate situation has nothing to do with the plastic bags from Austria. In other words: limiting plastic bags in Austria would do nothing to change the pollution of the oceans in other countries. Together with the consumers, the Austrian businesses follow the path of prevention, recycling and environmentally sound disposal at a high level.

Did you know that

- in Austria it is prohibited to dispose of plastic bags in landfills (Landfill Ordinance) because they are too valuable as an energy source?
- in Austria plastic bags are recycled or used either for energy or heat?
- a ban on plastic bags would contradict EU law (especially the European Packaging Directive)?
- plastic bags only make up about 0.2 percent of all household waste?

ANNUAL QUANTITIES

