

THE REAL STORY:

I'M NOT A PLASTIC BAG

Designer Anya Hindmarch's fabric shopping bag caused a sensation, using high fashion to promote the message that plastic bags are bad. It was never supposed to be the world's most sustainable sack, but met with serious criticism. So is it really bad?

How it started

Action group We Are What We Do decide to raise awareness of the 17.5 billion plastic bags picked up from shops each year by producing a fabric shopping bag. For maximum impact, they combine with top designer Anya Hindmarch and produce a limited quantity of bags. Shoppers queue at Sainsbury's in the wee small hours to buy one. They sell out within hours, only to appear on eBay later for hundreds of pounds.

VERDICT

This bag is cool. And that meant it got an important issue noticed. But there are better alternatives to the plastic bag. In fact don't bother buying a new bag at all – dig an old one out from the cupboard.

Dyes

After shipping, the bag is dyed brown, blue, green and charcoal grey. We couldn't find out whether the dyes used are natural or synthetic. Natural dyes are made from plant and vegetable compounds mixed with mineral salts. However, they're not widely used because they can't match the bright shades of synthetics.

FIND OUT MORE:

www.wearewhatwedo.org



Raw materials

The bag is made in unbleached cotton. However, the amount of pesticides used on cotton makes it one of the least environmentally friendly materials, and the fabric used in the bag is neither organic nor fairtrade. Non-organic cotton takes up only three per cent of the world's farmland, but uses 25 per cent of all chemical pesticides.



ALAMY

Manufacture

China, where the bag is made, is the world's biggest emitter of CO₂ after it overtook the US in June 2007. Chinese factories typically use electricity that has been generated from burning coal.

Transport

The bag is shipped 8,000 miles from China to the UK for sale in April – at a price of £5 – and again in summer, when a further 20,000 are produced – at £7.50. (Shipping accounts for five per cent of the world's CO₂ emissions.) In a bid to reduce the bag's carbon footprint, the company carbon-offsets by purchasing carbon credits.



ALAMY

ANORAK'S CORNER

ECO-TORCHES

In the war against batteries, winding, shaking and sitting in the sun can all help. But when you need light, and you need it now, do eco-torches do the business? Gill Chilton investigates



ALAMY

Shaking things up: eco-torches do away with batteries, which is no bad thing. We buy one billion in the UK each year. Many contain toxic or corrosive substances such as lead, mercury and cadmium. Most go into landfill. But new EU legislation will require us to recycle around 50 per cent.

Our mission began at night: my seven-year-old son and I put four battery-free nightlights to the test on the nightly goings-on in our garden.

The **Rimax Magic Light** (£9.99 at www.rmxdirect.co.uk) uses the principle that a magnet moving repeatedly through a coil generates electricity. That means fast shaking in a horizontal fashion. Doing this for 40 seconds is ridiculously frustrating and a lot of work for just three minutes of power.

More promising, and especially with small children, is the **Squeezy Dynamo Torch** (£9.75 at www.ecogadgets.com).

After some 30 squeezes, you're powered up for 10 minutes – enough to scour the garden until we got bored. No matter, another few compressions and we were back on. And on: our efforts sent the dynamo spinning time after time. This torch is great fun and perfect for young kids as it's so easy to power up.

Overtaking the mass market at the moment are wind-ups. High street chain Robert Dyas sells the **LED Dynamo Torch** (£4.99). One minute's winding equals 30 minutes light, so for an emergency kit, it's

great. It's also cheap enough to buy one for the car boot, one for the fuse box and one for camping.

My vote for regular use goes to the solar-powered option. Pop the **5 LED Solar Torch** (£7.50 at www.ecogadgets.com) on a windowsill by day to generate 2–3 hours of power. There's a compass on the end, so not only do you get light, but you won't get lost in the dark.

Gill Chilton is a journalist, consumer expert and Your Life's Contributing Editor

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GREEN CHALLENGE

GETTING TO WORK

Have you considered a greener commute? We set three Environment Agency colleagues the task of changing the way they travel to work for a week to find out how it affected them


CAR TO BIKE

Name: Peter Bond
Occupation: Operations
Technical Supporter
Distance from work: 8.5 miles


Pete's Verdict: My usual journey to work is along a busy A-road, but by bike I can use a Sustrans route. Travelling by bike didn't really change my routine, but I needed a change of clothes and a shower when I got in.

During the the challenge a number of unexpected site visits came up. I had to cycle home to pick up my 4x4 then drive over to the site. I also nearly got knocked off my bike by a roe deer crossing the track!

Travelling to work by bike every day isn't easy for me as I'm often out on site visits. Even though I got wet 7 out of the 10 journeys, I'll definitely cycle to work at least two days a week.



BEFORE	AFTER
Total carbon footprint: 25kg	Carbon footprint: 0
Hassle rating: 1	Hassle rating: 6
Conscience rating: 5	Conscience rating: 3
Weekly cost: £12	Cost: £0



BEFORE	AFTER
Carbon footprint: 0	Total carbon footprint: 11.5kg
Hassle rating: 4	Hassle rating: 5
Conscience rating: 1	Conscience rating: 8
Cost: £0	Cost: £1 per day

BIKE TO CAR


Name: Michael Guthrie
Occupation: Head of Customer/Community Relations
Distance from work: 4 miles

Michael's Verdict: For me, travelling to work by car meant sitting in traffic jams, road rage, feeling lethargic and being less alert in the office.

The evening journey was really frustrating as the traffic

queue started 100ft from the office. Looking around me, it seemed pointless to use a car with just one person sitting in it.

In terms of routine, I found myself leaving earlier in the morning and later in the evening to beat the traffic, but that's not why I won't drive. I feel much fitter when I'm cycling to work – driving adds cost and makes me feel guilty when I could so easily cycle or get the bus.



BEFORE	AFTER
Total carbon footprint: 17kg	New carbon footprint: 1kg
Hassle rating: 2	Hassle rating: 2 in the sun, 8 in the rain
Conscience rating: 6	Conscience rating: 4
Cost: £1 per day	Cost: up to £7.60 per day

Conscience rating:

1 = I'm saving the planet
10 = I'm harming the planet

CAR TO BUS

Name: Vicky Quill-Bishop
Occupation: Business Editor
Distance from work: 6 miles

Vicky's Verdict: I quite enjoyed taking a bus to work – it's more restful than using the car. I discovered that buses go everywhere, and I got to see baby chicks by the pond I walked past.

The major discomfort for me was waiting at the cold bus stop on a wet, windy day. Plus

there was no leeway for a lie-in or I'd miss the bus. Deciding how to dress each morning at 7am when the weather is so changeable was tricky, but the early start meant my buses were quick and on time.

Because there was a short walk to and from the bus stop to my house, I felt more awake when I got to work. I may still take the car on wet, cold days, but I'll certainly take the bus at least twice a week.

KEY

Hassle rating:
1 = easy peasy
10 = mega hard

To work out your carbon footprint, go to www.actonco2.direct.gov.uk

AMAZING IDEAS

BIO-PHONE

In one sense mobiles are good news for the environment – every time we talk and text we save the paper we'd use to post a letter. But the fact that in Europe we throw away about 100 million mobiles each year – the vast majority of which work perfectly well – means they're one of the least green bits of kit around.

But what if you made a mobile that didn't hang around in landfill for hundreds of years? That's the thinking behind a research project started by Dr Kerry Kirwan of WMG at Warwick University.

Kirwan and his team have developed a 'biophone' whose outer casing looks like plastic but is actually made of poly-vinyl alcohol. When composted, it disintegrates, releasing a seed.



Left to right: Kerry Kirwan, Peter Morris, Director of PVAXX, and Dan Jacobs, an engineering researcher, with their prize

The prototype device, which was developed with Motorola and research firm PVAXX, includes a dwarf sunflower that germinates when put into wet, nitrate-rich soil. The project is currently in the development phase, but the team hopes it'll soon become a commercial reality.

FIND OUT MORE
www.vopnet.org

KNOW YOUR WORLD

10 surprising facts about: tap water

- Just £1 a year covers the metered cost of what you drink in a year, compared with £1.50 for one day's worth of Evian.
- It's good for your health – scientists argue that the trace elements in tap water provide a mineral boost.
- If you live in the north of the UK, you're more likely to be drinking lake or river water.
- Washing machines use 14 per cent of all domestic water.
- Saving water can help your business. An Enhanced Capital Allowances scheme gives tax breaks when you buy water-efficient technology.
- Embedded or 'hidden water' pushes a person's daily water usage from 150 litres to more like 3,400 litres. A tomato has 13 litres of water behind it. Log on to www.waterfootprint.org for what you've washed down today.
- England has less water available per person than parts of the Middle East and Africa.
- You can waste around nine litres of water running a tap in summertime before it feels cold enough to drink.
- You can find organic carbon, tetrachloroethene, sulphate, potassium, copper, chlorine, calcium and ammonium in a tap nearby.
- Your bottled water may have come from a tap, not a mineral spring. Dasani and Aquafina are both reprocessed city water.



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IF THERE'S ONE...



... BOOK TO GET

Sea Change: Britain's Coastal Catastrophe
Richard Girling
£16.99, Eden Project Books 2007

There's a sense of when, not if, about this book. We've failed to listen and respect our environment, stripped the sea of fish and filled it with waste. And yet Girling's potentially gloomy book has a few surprises. He shows an insatiable thirst for raw facts – like one in five cigarettes smoked in the UK is smuggled and beach-goers leave behind 150 times more litter

than fly-tippers. He takes a fresh angle on many issues and his witty, wry writing style makes this an entertaining read.

In a country where no-one lives more than 72 miles from the sea, we all have coastal links. Childhood holidays, eco-aspirations, flooding, political experiences... this book ties everything together. Along with the author's solutions, which may just turn the tide, you come away caring that bit more about our sea.

Gill Chilton

ALSO TRY...

The Organic Directory 2007-8
Edited by Clive Litchfield
£8.95, Green Books with the Soil Association 2007

This is the definitive sourcebook for anyone seeking an organic lifestyle. Find farmers' markets, organic baby food, textiles, B&Bs and much more.

Eco-Centres & Courses
Terena Plowright
£12.95, Green Books 2007

Learn about composting toilets, bee keeping and solar power at one of 150 eco-courses and fun days.

Q&A

ECO CONUNDRUMS

PLASTIC RECYCLING



With **Paul Davidson**,
Plastics Technology
Manager at WRAP
(Waste & Resources
Action Programme)

Q: I have to drive eight miles to my nearest plastics recycling point. Am I doing more harm than good by doing so?

A: Well firstly, it depends on whether you'd be using that route anyway. Lots of recycle points are in supermarket car parks, so it's easy to get into the habit of dropping off when you food shop.

At WRAP, we never encourage a journey just for recycling. Every half a mile that you drive produces the same amount of CO₂ emissions as are saved by recycling one plastic milk bottle (around 63g of carbon). So you need to take 16 empty milk containers to your recycling point to offset what your car produces by driving the eight miles there.

Q: You mention milk containers. What's wrong with recycling

things like yoghurt pots and plastic fast-food trays?

A: Nothing! All plastics melt, so they can be recycled, but it's down to economics. It's only worthwhile for councils to collect plastics that can be easily prepared. Bottles tend to be cleaner: milk, cola, fabric conditioner and shampoo are all easily rinsed. Yoghurt, cling films and solid foods cause more problems. Tetra Pak, who manufacture juice cartons, have their own send-back scheme (see www.tetrapakrecycling.co.uk).

Q: So could I recycle old plastic toys and garden pots?

A: For the moment, the best guide is to read what your council wants – there are lists at recycle points and on home collection bags and boxes. Going with the 'can be recycled' symbol on a product only tells you what is possible, not what your council is doing right now.

FIND OUT MORE
www.wrap.org.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waste/



ALAMY

... EVENT TO GO TO

25–27 August
IWA National Festival and Boat Show 2007
St Ives, Cambridgeshire

Be among 30,000 visitors and 600 visiting boats for one of the UK's largest waterways events. Organised by the Environment Agency and the Inland Waterways Association, there are a huge number of entertainments.

Take a ride on a steam boat, relax on the water with a boat trip and browse through all sorts of boats for sale. If you don't fancy trawling the stalls for boat parts or having a boat

maintenance lesson, why not watch one of the gourmet cookery demonstrations or sample some of the delicious food and ales on offer?

And if you're taking children along, there are lots of 'Wild Over Waterways' events happening, plus a cowboy skills show, native American dancing and line dancing. Set in the historic town of St Ives, this promises to be a stellar day out.

Adults £8.50; under-16s free.
www.waterways.org.uk/Events/IWANationalFestival07

Until 2 September
Exhibition: Exposed!
 Climate change photographs by the National Trust and Magnum Photos.
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/expose

15 Sept, London and 23 Sept, Leeds
Fundraiser: Tree-Athlon
 Walk 5km to help tree planting and care in the UK and overseas.
www.tree-athlon.org

21 October
Event: Apple Day
 Celebrate the apple harvest with events across the UK.
www.commonground.org.uk

... TV PROGRAMME TO WATCH

Earth: Power of the Planet
BBC Two
September

What happened during Earth's infancy? What events shaped our planet's history and allowed life to flourish? Using spectacular images and compelling science, this new series from the BBC follows the personal journey of Dr Iain Stewart on his quest to answer these questions.

He takes us back to our planet's birth 4.6 billion years ago and tells the story of the major events that have shaped Earth's history.

Each episode reveals a different force at work – volcanoes, the ocean, the atmosphere and ice. Dr Stewart travels to some of the most remote places on the planet, from abseiling into a lava lake in Ethiopia to cave diving in a meteor crater. He discovers how volcanoes saved the planet, how a rainstorm lasted for thousands of years and how the Mediterranean Sea once dried up.

This landmark new series shows how the world's incredible systems work together to maintain the delicate balance of life on Earth.

The River Cottage Fishing Trip
Channel 4
August

Foodie and fish-lover Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall takes you on a trip around the British Isles on the trail of delicious, sustainable seafood that won't deplete the nation's fish stocks.

Tommy Walsh's Eco House
Discovery Real Time
October

DIY handyman Tommy Walsh and his team work through the challenge of building an eco-home in 60 days for £60,000, using only the greenest methods and materials.



PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

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ONE LAST THING...

PET THREAT

Our furry friends offer comfort, companionship and care, but they can pack a dangerous environmental punch too, says **Penney Poyzer**



British moggies catch up to 275 million prey items a year. The average cat in this country consumes more protein in a day than someone living in sub-Saharan Africa.

ALAMY

I live with a mass murderer called Puzzle. There, I've come clean. And I know for a fact that around 7.5 million other people in the UK are living with one too.

If you own a cat, you are housing a bringer of carnage. The Mammal Society estimates that the UK's cats catch up to 275 million prey items a year, of which 55 million are birds. This forms just part of the tally of crimes against the environment that Puzzle and co. account for.

Cats are not the only criminals: there are around seven million dogs in the UK, producing about 900 tonnes of waste a day. Their faeces can contain *Toxocara canis*, a roundworm damaging to children's eyes. Animal waste really is a nasty business.

It's obvious when you think about it, but the environmental issues arising from our pets rarely come up on the green lifestyle radar. When you also take into consideration the waste from food packaging, the cull of small mammals and birds by cats, and the problem of how to deal with poo in an eco-friendly way, the care of pets takes on a whole new meaning.

Animal madness

Be honest, don't those TV adverts depicting young women practically swooning as they lovingly spoon out premium grade meat products for their understandably smug moggies – and doggies – make you feel just a little embarrassed?

The desire of pet owners to ensure the health and comfort of their pets feeds a mega-bucks industry. The UK pet food market is huge in its own right – worth around £1.5 billion.

Or perhaps you'll be glad to know that you can ensure your dog is properly hydrated by giving them specially formulated mineral water that comes in three 'great' meat flavours. If your dog looks bored, you could always play a CD of songs favoured by dogs. This was compiled by an LA dog 'medium' who surveyed 200 dogs to ascertain their consensus.

How do you green up your pet without giving them a complex?

1 Get your pet from a rescue centre and have it neutered – we need to manage our pet population.

2 Put a collar and bell on Kitty so birds and mice get a head start when tabby is in hunter mode.

3 Keep your cat indoors when birds are most vulnerable: at least an hour before sunset and an hour after sunrise, especially March–July and December–January.

4 Buy food in the largest box, bag or tin you can: you'll reduce your waste and save pounds.

5 If you buy cat litter, use a product that is made from a recycled material as this reduces the environmental impact.

6 Be responsible for your dog litter and be a legal beagle. Take a biodegradable bag and place the 'gift' in it. Put it in your landfill bin.

7 Biodegradable nappy sacks make excellent, cost-effective dog mess bags.

8 Get a pet loo for the garden. These are tanks that are buried in the garden and safely degrade waste.

9 Feed the birds, but place feeders high off the ground. And make sure they're away from surfaces from which a cat could jump.

10 Look into a vegetarian diet for your pet. It helps to reduce the over-production of meat that contributes to global warming.

We give our creatures comfort and our creatures comfort us. Stroking a cat or dog is medically proven to reduce stress. However, we need to bear in mind the need to reduce the pressure on the planet and all the life forms it is home to – not just our pampered pets.

Useful contacts

www.veggiepets.com

Biodegradable, toilet-flushable, non-toxic litter trays.

www.spiritofnature.co.uk/acatalog/biodegradablenappies

Spirit of Nature biodegradable nappy sacks for dog waste.

www.petstuffonline.co.uk

Armitage Clean Green Dog Loo.

www.petcds.com

A fun site of tunes to tickle your pooches ears.