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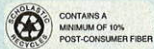
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ON THE COVER:
Boys in Ghana
break apart
computers to
sell the metals
inside.

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAMIEN SCOGIN

IN THE NEWS

PUTTING PLASTIC

It's a growing trend: In January, Los Angeles banned plastic shopping bags. San Francisco and more than 100 other cities and counties across the U.S. have similar laws, and California is considering a state-wide ban. Some places that allow plastic bags now require shoppers who want them to pay a fee—a nickel or a dime, for instance.

That's because so much of the plastic we use ends up in landfills and waterways, where it can kill birds, fish, and other animals that get tangled in it and drown, or try to eat it and choke. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Americans generated 32 million tons of plastic waste in 2012 and recycled only 9 percent of it.

This has created a major environmental problem because plastic takes a long time to decompose. Unlike food waste, which decays and is gone in weeks or months, plastic

takes decades, or even centuries, to break down. (See the marine debris chart below.)

Manufacturers and recyclers of plastic bags think the bans are misguided. They say that the bags can be recycled, and that 9 out of 10 Americans reuse them for things like packing lunch, lining trash cans, and picking up after their dogs. They also point out that more than 30,000 people across the U.S. have jobs related to plastic bag manufacturing and recycling. Bans jeopardize those jobs.

Some people worry that in focusing on plastic bags, we'll lose sight of the bigger picture—the many other ways we pollute the planet.

Even so, Seattle resident Robb Krehbiel thinks his city's plastic bag ban is a good idea. "It's not going to be a silver bullet that solves all our environmental problems," he says. "But my thinking is you do what you can, when you can, where you can."

WASTE IN THE WATER: HOW LONG TILL IT'S GONE?



WAXED MILK CARTON
3 months



PLASTIC BAG
10-20 years



FOAM-PLASTIC CUP
50 years

SOURCE: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Program

Volunteers cleaning up the trash-clogged waters of the Vacha Dam in Bulgaria in 2009

IN ITS PLACE?

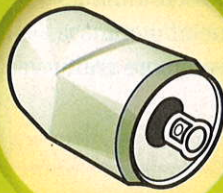


CONTEST NAME THAT GREEN GIANT!

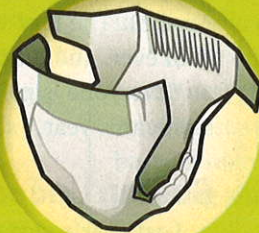


I'm the U.S. Senator who founded Earth Day. First observed on April 22, 1970, it has bloomed into a worldwide celebration. Who am I?

Send your answer to junior@scholastic.com by 4/28/14. We'll randomly select one entry with the correct answer to receive a \$25 iTunes gift card.



ALUMINUM CAN
80-200 years



DISPOSABLE DIAPER
450 years



PLASTIC BEVERAGE BOTTLE
450 years



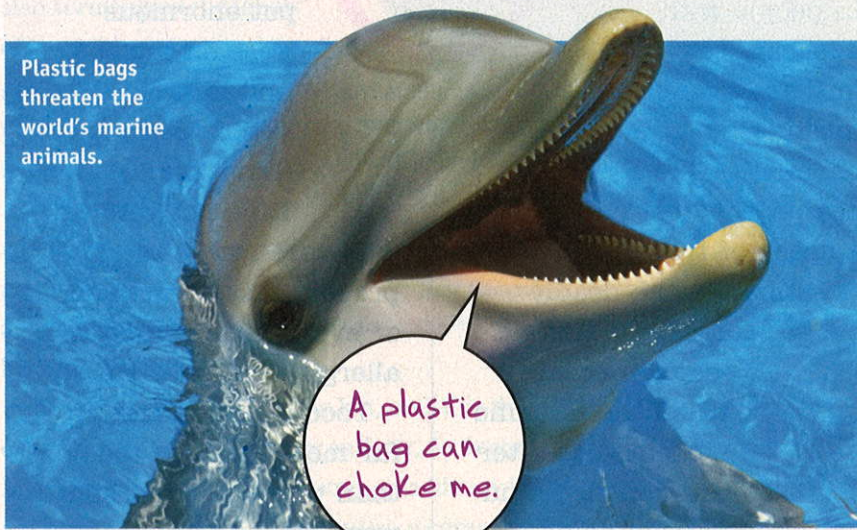
PLASTIC FISHING LINE
600 years

ESSAY KIT
What you need to
write a perfect essay

Plastic Bags: Convenient and Cruel

They come in handy for carrying your groceries—or your lunch or your dirty sneakers. But are they worth it? **BY LAUREN MAGAZINER**

Plastic bags threaten the world's marine animals.



Plastic bags are on the loose: They're floating through oceans, tumbling across deserts, and sliding along city streets. Humans use an estimated 1 trillion plastic bags every year. That's about 10 times the number of stars in the Milky Way galaxy!

Yes, plastic bags are useful, but experts say they are wreaking havoc on the environment. Already, cities like San Francisco and Washington, D.C., have placed restrictions on the use of plastic bags.

Is it time to ban them for good?

Poisonous Plastic

Most things you throw away—like food or paper—are

biodegradable. Plastic, a material made by humans, is not. Though plastic bags will disintegrate over several decades, minuscule pieces of plastic remain.

In other words, plastic bags never really go away.

So where do the bags end up?

Some people put used plastic bags in the garbage to be taken to **landfills.** Other people mistakenly place them in general plastic **recycling** bins, and the bags end up damaging expensive machinery. (Plastic bags can't be recycled with other plastic items, like bottles and containers.) Most often, though, plastic bags blow away and get swept out to sea. And that is where they cause the most trouble.

In the ocean, marine animals mistake floating bags for food. Just one nibble can be deadly. Plastic bags can block the digestive tract, causing a slow and agonizing death. Other animals are strangled when bags wrap around their bodies. In all, thousands of marine animals—including sea turtles, seals, seabirds, dolphins, whales, and sharks—die each year because of plastic bags.

But marine animals aren't the only ones eating plastic. When the harmful chemicals in plastic **leach** into the ground or are ingested by land or sea animals, the chemicals become part of our **food chain.** That means you may have unknowingly swallowed a bit of a plastic bag too.

So if plastic bags are so terrible, how did they end up in every store?

Good Intentions

In 1977, when plastic bags were first introduced to shoppers, they seemed like a huge improvement over paper bags. They were cheaper to produce and less prone to break.

Plus, they seemed to be better for the environment. Paper bags are made by heating woodchips in a chemical solution. This