

Plastics Life Cycle – or  
What goes around comes around  
The Union article Dec. 2023

It's only one little plastic bag ripped off the roll– right? Forget that once it fulfills its purpose a day, or maybe a week, later it is usually trashed – unless it is reused over and over until it gives up. But if one cares about the state of the environment, it matters!

Multiply that one little bag from one store in Nevada County times millions of people all over the world that do the same thing. According to *The World Counts*, globally, people use 5 trillion plastic bags a year, 19 billion in California alone. Less than ONE percent are recycled, or captured for reprocessing into recycled content goods. The rest go to landfill where they take years, or less, to degrade into microplastics, now known to be hazardous to human health. They never really go away.

Think about the life cycle of every item available – it all is extracted somehow (nasty emissions and lots of energy used) and transported to a facility that makes something of it (more energy and nasty emissions). Then more energy and emissions being transported all around the country (or world).

We can change that trajectory by thinking in terms of a Circular life style before we buy – first considering what it took as a cost to the environment to make that material item. The choice of a material is important to reducing waste – can it be recycled, recovered or reused?

What to do to reduce plastic waste?

- REFUSE items packaged in plastic boxes or wraps with no redeeming value. Can it be had in bulk? Can it be had fresh in another store, or farmers market?
- RESIST taking yet another check-out plastic bag that is not necessary if you BYO – bring your own cool shopping bags that are infinitely reusable (almost). Please be aware that the flimsy, often green, pre-checkout bags will be banned as of January 2025 – start to convert now!
- REMEMBER to take the bag into the market – or, if forgotten, refuse either plastic or paper by leaving groceries in your cart to take to the car to bag.
- REUSE as much as possible.
- REDUCE the household trash a lot by not getting plastic containers in the first place.
- REFILL empty jugs at the Gaia Soap store, and at Briarpatch.
- RETHINK our relationship with trash – and our consumption. Let's go for JUST ENOUGH.

What goes around comes around – this can be a positive when we reuse, or a negative when we think of the ramifications of trashed plastic accumulating right here in our Yuba River, affecting the life of the river, and species in the river. This “Mockumentary” on the life cycle of the “majestic” plastic bag is quite entertaining for children and adults alike – and sadly – true. It shows its journey of our hero, the plastic bag, through some trials and tribulations to the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. It was produced by The World Counts, found under Global Challenges. <https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/planet-earth/waste/plastic-bags-used-per-year>

Let's consider a new year resolution to look at the cost to the Environment at every stage of the life cycle of every manufactured material, which is important to think of before we buy – or use. Reducing our consumption is necessary in order to reduce all the other pieces of the puzzle. (Refer to the life cycle image below please). Why can't we be more like nature? Nature developed efficient systems that move substances and elements in cycles so there is no waste.

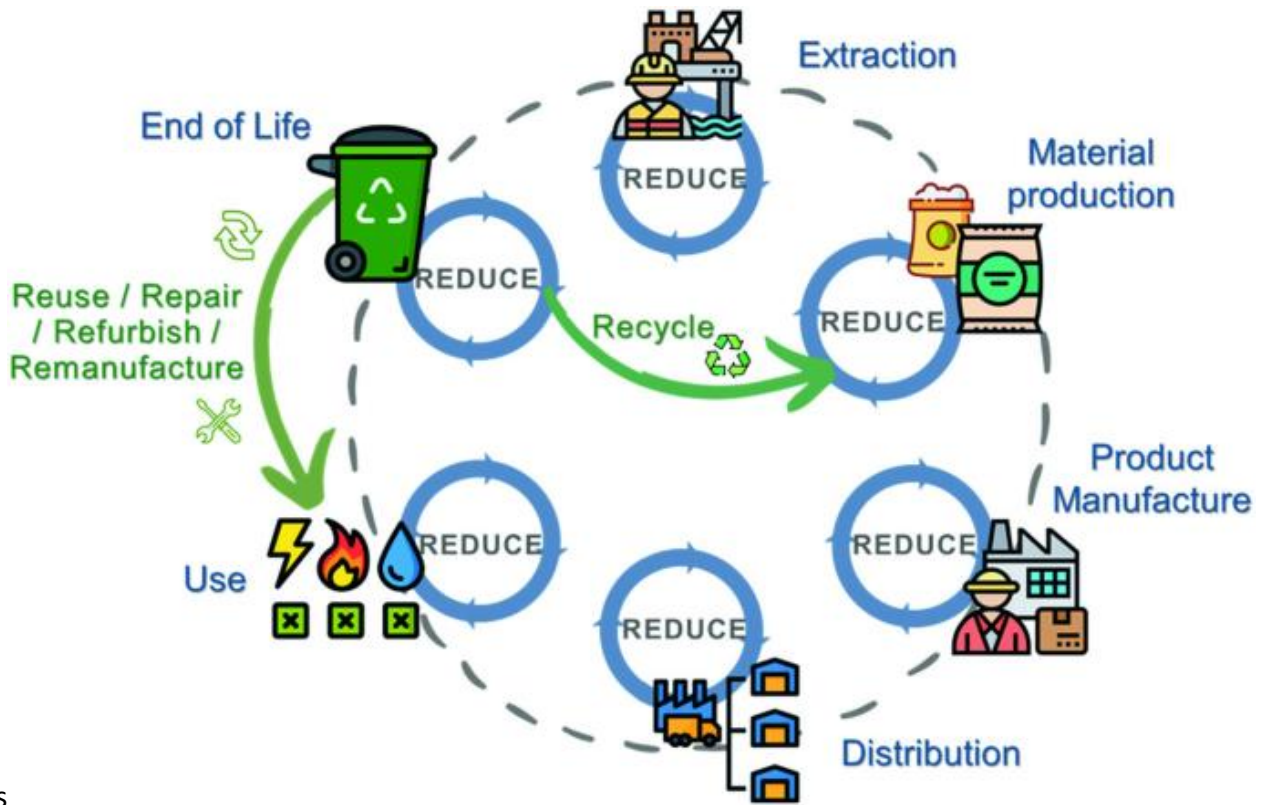
Thanks for doing your part to refuse plastic (or paper, for that matter, since also depletes the carbon-storing trees) bags and bring your own!

600 words

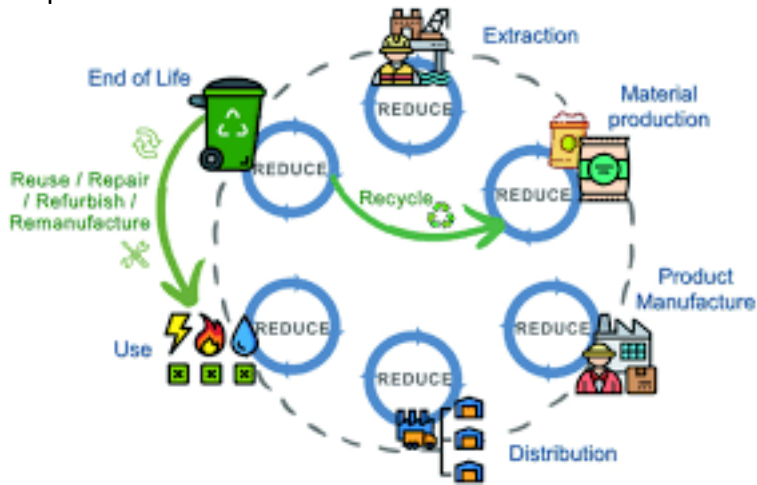
Shirley Freriks is on the WasteNOT team, working to educate on the advantages of recycling and plastic reduction. Look at the WasteNOT Facebook page for good information and to ask questions, or write [WASTENOT.PLASTIC@GMAIL.COM](mailto:WASTENOT.PLASTIC@GMAIL.COM) - Nevada County Climate Action Now  
<https://www.ncclimateactionnow.org/recycle>

Image/ [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-8510-4\\_3](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-15-8510-4_3) Life Cycle Thinking in a Circular Economy - Hard to find the image there - Image shows here  
<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-1-d&q=Materials+life+cycle#imgsrc=mALc5WzuzEaRUM&imgdii=yRqmPhnQih796M>

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