

TALKING TRASH

The right bag means better value, less waste

by Randy Orscheln



Essential for sanitation and waste management, garbage bags are an unavoidable spend for businesses and institutions. As a result, opportunities for substantial cost savings and improved sustainability practices can be easily overlooked.

There are numerous ways to get more value from garbage bag expenditures and generate less waste without sacrificing quality. Measures include conducting a facility audit, using the right-size bags for the job, and choosing bags that contain fewer raw materials and more recycled resins.

THE RAW DEAL

Every garbage bag begins as raw material, or plastic resin. The raw material is a key factor in the price of each garbage bag, large or small, heavy-duty or lightweight. Generally, it represents 50 per cent or more of a garbage bag's total cost. A bag that hangs more than four to six inches over the rim of a receptacle is wasted raw material. Resources are also wasted if a bag is far heavier or stronger than necessary for the application.

BAG CHECK

A garbage bag audit is ideal for customers who use a large quantity of bags on an annual basis. Conducted by a knowledgeable person who is equipped with the right tools, the purpose of the audit is to ensure the facility is using the right-size bags and they're of suitable strength and material, too. This is where savings can really add up.

SIZE MATTERS

Twenty-three-gallon and 44-gallon receptacles are two of the most popular waste receptacle sizes today. While it may seem easier for maintenance staff to use the same-size bag for both, tying off the bigger bag to make it fit the smaller receptacle means more than 40 per cent of the raw materials used in the bag will go to waste, along with money spent on the bag.

Choosing the correct-size garbage bag involves three steps.

First, establish the proper bag type (material) for the application: linear low-density or high-density. Linear low-density bags are often produced at heavier gauges, generally more opaque and have a thicker feel. These types of bags are best-suited for waste that may contain sharp objects since the material is less susceptible to tearing if punctured. High-density garbage bags are typically thinner in gauge and feel, and can hold more weight. This makes them a good choice for light, medium or heavy waste that's free of sharp objects.

Next, determine what size receptacle the bag needs to fit. In most cases, gallon capacity is printed on the receptacle.

Finally, decide how much weight the bag needs to hold. This involves weighing the collected garbage bag and comparing it to the bag's strength rating.

LEAN WASTE STREAM

With up to 25 million tonnes of waste going to landfills each year, according to data collected by Environment and Climate Change Canada, it is important to consider source reduction when choosing the correct garbage bag for the application.

For some time now, Canadian manufacturers of garbage bags have been utilizing recycled resins in production to reduce costs and provide an environmentally responsible product. Most manufacturers utilize both post-consumer and post-industrial resins. Post-consumer resin is created from plastic material that has completed its life cycle as a consumer item and is removed from the waste stream. Post-industrial resin is material, such as scrap, from the manufacturing process that is diverted from the waste stream. Typically, third party certification of the recycled content is available from most manufacturers.

Compostable garbage bags are recommended for food scraps and organic waste. These bags are generally not intended for landfills and go to a composting facility. Compostable garbage bags must meet the stringent requirements of ASTM D6400, with third party certifications. Commercial degradation is 10 to 45 days, and biodegradation is less than six months. /

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