



Toxics Link
for a toxics-free world

Non-woven 'cloth' bags are nothing but plastic!

New Delhi, September 10, 2020: A new study titled 'Environmental illusion The non-woven bag' released by Delhi-based advocacy organisation Toxics Link today, busts the myth that non-woven bags are an eco-friendly alternative to plastic bags and reveals that they are nothing but polypropylene (a form of plastic) thereby emphasising the need for informing and educating the consumers regarding their reality. The study results indicate that 88% of the respondents have replaced plastic bags with alternatives while 45% have replaced plastic bags with non-woven bags. Ironically all markets where single-use plastic is banned are being swamped with these NW bags creating a huge confusion in the perception of consumers.

The Toxics Link survey was carried out amongst different retailers and vendors in Delhi to assess the usage of plastic bags and its alternatives and looked at different types of establishments to understand if plastic bags are still widely used or the alternatives have become popular. Clearly the lack of correct information or misleading information is leading most vendors to use plastic (non-woven PP) as replacement for normal plastic. Five samples of non-woven bags were sent to an accredited laboratory based in New Delhi wherein polypropylene and polyester (both are plastic resins) were found in them. Thus the test results clearly confirm and establish the fact that the consumers are being hoodwinked and made to believe that the NW carry bags with a clothlike appearance are biodegradable which is far from the truth. "The lower cost of non-woven bags, compared to most other alternatives, is one big reason that the establishments prefer to hand out these. Though the study was conducted in Delhi, secondary research suggests that non-woven bags are used widely all over the country. Since the materials used to make the non-woven bags are also plastics, these bags too pose an equal threat to the environment like plastic bags and are clearly not the lesser of two evils," said Priti Mahesh, Chief Programme Coordinator at Toxics Link.

At the national level, Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016 have been enacted, wherein the minimum thickness of the bags which can be used is 50 microns. There have been also stricter regulations at the state level with some states banning the plastic bags entirely and some restricting their usage in ecologically sensitive areas. States like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have specified banning of non-woven bags in the overall plastic ban regulation. But the



industry continues to assert that NWPP (non-woven polypropylene) bags are the best alternative to polythene or regular plastic bags, citing their durability and also claiming that they are environment-friendly.

Some industry players also claim that NWPP bags are bio-degradable. Though some local and regional government agencies have explicitly admitted that NWPP bags are not the right choice, there is still lack of clarity on the issue. Clearly the regulators have not come out with any clarification and advice to consumers let alone stopping the use of such bags.

"Regulatory agencies have a huge role to play in including non-woven bags containing plastic resins, in the list of banned or restricted plastic bags, as done by few states already. But even beyond this, there is a huge need to educate the establishments, who at times have voluntarily shifted to non-woven bags as a measure to be environment-friendly," said Satish Sinha, Associate Director at Toxics Link.

Key findings:

- The study clearly establishes that NW bags are also plastic bags and cannot be used as alternates and there is need for increased public awareness on their reality
- 45% of the respondents have replaced plastic bags with non-woven bags, and 40% are replacing it with paper
- Though the study was conducted in Delhi, secondary research suggests that NW are used widely all over the country
- Rampant use of non-woven bags as an alternative has been found among vegetables and fruit cooperatives
- The common misconception among consumers is that NW bags are bio-degradable and eco-friendly. 46% of the respondents were of the opinion that non-woven bags will bio-degrade, but a large percentage (44%) were unsure. Only 10% of them said that these replacements were non-biodegradable.
- Strict enforcement on ground is needed to ensure reduction on use of NWPP bags

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