

Film, bag collections on rise

By [Mike Verespej](#) | PLASTICS NEWS CORRESPONDENT

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Despite a modest increase of 2.23 percent in the volume of plastic film and bags recycled in 2007, it is important to keep momentum going with specific recycling initiatives, said Nina Bellucci Butler, a project manager at Moore Recycling Associates Inc.

The Sonoma, Calif.-based consultant firm compiled data for a recent film recycling report for the American Chemistry Council trade group in Arlington, Va.

“There is a lot more awareness of recycling in the marketplace,” Butler said at the Plastics Recycling Conference in Orlando. Though just 18 million more pounds of film were collected in 2007 vs. 2006, manufacturers are using less material and retailers distributing fewer bags, she said.

According to the study, some 830 million pounds of plastic bags and film were collected in 2007 — comprising roughly 84 percent stretch film and 15 percent single-use shopping bags.

“We need to continue to encourage consumers to bring back materials and use the existing infrastructure for collection,” Butler said. She pointed to initiatives such as one in Chapel Hill, N.C., in which small businesses take film and bags to a local grocery store to be recycled.

“My concern with the plastic shopping bag bans that have gone into effect and that are being proposed in different communities is that where they occur, you begin to lose the option to recycle not just the bags, but all the film,” she said.

In the past five years, Walt Disney Co. has collected 2.6 million pounds of stretch wrap and bags at Disneyland in Anaheim, Calif., and another 1.9 million pounds at Walt Disney World in Orlando, according to Butler. In January, Disney introduced merchandise bags made from 100 percent recycled content at those sites, as well as on its cruise ships — a significant sustainable push, as Disney hands out roughly 47 million bags a year, Butler said.

Even with the market downturn that began last fall, prices still justify recovery, she said. “Prices are still strong enough to support collection in at least the commercial sector,” she said, noting that clear, clean polyethylene film — typically stretch wrap — can command 20-25 cents per pound. But bags collected curbside have “zero value,” she added.

In the past six weeks, a rebounding export market has offered higher prices, she said.

But businesses can no longer rely on haulers to pick up loose material. “With the downturn in the market, we need to work to try and encourage haulers to pick up film with cardboard. But it has to be packed well. To get them to pick up stuff that is not properly packed is almost impossible,” she said.