

'Bag It!' hits home on 'throwaway' lifestyle

By **Nina Wu**

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Buy a single container of peach yogurt, and you'll likely end up taking it home in a plastic bag, according to narrator Jeb Berrier in the documentary "Bag It!"

You take that bag home, shove it somewhere with all the other bags under the kitchen sink, and eventually you'll throw some away just to be done with them.

"We all have a lot of bags, right? We all do the same thing," says Berrier, who describes himself as just an average guy from Colorado and no tree hugger.

The one line from the documentary that struck home was: "Just because plastic is disposable doesn't mean it just goes away ... After all, where is away? There is no away ... It actually sticks around for a really long time."

Away is at the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill, which is over capacity.

Away is the city's attempt to ship some of this stuff to Washington state, which didn't happen.

The film, screened earlier this month at the Capitol Auditorium, has many messages, but what hit me the most was how prevalent the "throwaway" lifestyle is in the United States today. We use so many products that were created as single-use plastics — whether it be a plastic bag, cup, or bottle of water. How many of us eat our plate lunch in a Styrofoam container in a plastic bag, with a plastic fork, then toss them in the trash? The same goes for those lattes and Americanos we get from the coffee shop in single-use paper cups lined with plastic.

With bans on plastic checkout bags in place, Maui and Kauai counties have taken the first step toward reducing waste — the highest priority of the three "Rs" of reduce, reuse, recycle.

The state Legislature is considering bills that would extend the ban statewide, but in the meantime, Honolulu is behind. On the mainland, San Francisco

has banned plastic bags, while Washington, D.C., charges a fee for plastic bags. Outside the United States, similar measures have been put in place all over the globe — in China, Taiwan, South Africa, Australia and Canada.

"Bag It!" contains alarming statistics along with depressing images of bits of plastic choking marine life, but the uplifting message is that each one of us can make a difference through simple lifestyle changes.

Here are three steps we all can take to reduce single-use plastic:

» Bring our own reusable bags to the grocery store and other shops.

» Bring our own container to the coffee shop.

» Stop drinking bottled water and opt for a reusable bottle instead (stainless steel is best).

Going to the beach here — pretty much any local beach — is disheartening. You are guaranteed to see cigarette butts, pieces of plastic and Styrofoam littered on the sand.

People like Jessica Spurrier, a member of the Surfrider Foundation, inspire me. Spurrier, who went to see the documentary, says she and her kids (ages 9 and 15) pick up trash on every trip to the beach. Why do they do it?

"Basically, we cherish the ocean," she said.

It's just part of Spurrier's lifestyle, and something she is teaching her kids to do as well. An assistant professor at Hawaii Pacific University, she always brings her own bags to the store to reduce the number of single-use plastic bags that end up in waterways and oceans.

She says she wouldn't mind paying a fee for biodegradable bags at the grocery store.

"It boils down to I'm a mom," she said. "To pay 5 or 10 cents, and know it goes to a safer and better environment for our children is worth it to me."

The film "Bag It!" not only covers what plastic bags are made from (fossil fuels, a nonrenewable resource), but how they affect marine life. To see a trailer of the movie and links to more information on these issues, go to bagitmovie.com.

Berrier points out that our grandparents lived without the convenience of single-use disposables, back in the days when life was more simple. So why can't we?

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