

Transcript

Sustainability Day - 28 October 2020

Going on a plastic diet (Q & A) by Mary and Theresa, Sisters Against Plastic

Theresa: Lucy's asked if we want to do a 5 minute Q&A. Yes. So sanitary products, yes, there are so many options for these at the moment. All of the things I'm going to show you now have never been worn, they are clean, so no need to get worried. These are WUKA pants. So these are period pants, and these act as a menstrual pad and you just wear them like pants, and then throw them in the wash afterwards. These have been an absolute lifesaver to me and in fact me and Mary were talking the other day and as a last resort going back to sanitary pads, that kind of thing, why would we do this to ourselves, this is so uncomfortable. So these, you can get little ones, you can get loads of different alternatives. The options out there for wearable and washable sanitary pads are brilliant. Don't forget that moon cup. Again this is back to the make do and mend age, I'm sure lots of people have come across these before, they are fantastic. Absolutely brilliant. There's loads of things. I can see somebody is recommending Modibodi. There's loads of them. They're fantastic. They'll change your life.

Lucy: That's brilliant. Thank you. There's a question about bin liners. I don't throw an awful lot of stuff out actually. We're really lucky. I'm in Milton Keynes so the council recycle quite a lot and we just have to chuck it in a bag but normal bin liners I really struggle with. I just don't know where to start because obviously it's a huge plastic bag. Is there any kind of more eco-friendly alternatives?

Well this is quite a classic problem because there are on the market biodegradable plastic bin liners. However the problem here with something like a biodegradable plastic bin liner is when that bin liner goes away on the lorry it usually goes to one of two places. First of all it can go to landfill and when it's in landfill it doesn't have the correct conditions to biodegrade. So that biodegrading isn't happening anyway. The second place that your bins might go to, which is the case for us, is it goes to incineration. So actually having a biodegradable bin liner is completely useless because it's just being burnt anyway. One of the things that we do is we try and make sure that our bins are dry rubbish. So actually you don't need a bin liner anyway.

What I've got in my kitchen is I've got 2 small bins. One bin, which has a small plastic liner and that's for wet rubbish, so any kind of scrapings of your dinner. I've also got a dry rubbish bin which is maybe just some dry packaging. That dry rubbish can go directly into my wheelie bin, it doesn't need to be packaged up again. So that's one way of eliminating just a little bit of a plastic bin liner. Also in my bathroom I use paper to line my bins. There's no reason to have plastic bin liners in there anyway.

Lucy: Thank you. Yes that's pretty helpful because it's one of those things that I've been having a bit of a battle with myself of whether I should be buying these eco bin liners, they are quite a lot more expensive but actually if they're not necessarily going to biodegrade. Like I said, personally it's not something that we've gone into because for us it's not anything that's going to change.

Lucy: I'd rather put that expense to something else that I think is probably going to make a bigger change. So I don't know if we've got any questions from anyone in the audience.

Jodi: I saw on a programme recently about biodegradable starch-based carrier bags, apparently that could be the future. Do you think that that's going to be something that is the future or do you think that they're probably just making something that we don't need?

I think there's a couple of issues around that as well. I mean if it's disposed of in the right way then yes it's fine and I think the starch bags are better than the biodegradable bags because the genuine potato starch bags will biodegrade in your home compost. So if the person receiving that and using that bag has access to a compost that they then put it in, or has a council that collects food waste, it will then go to the right place and get disposed of. But if it's just put in the normal waste bin it's kind of the same as just a normal bag. So there's a lot of learning that needs to go alongside it to make sure that we actually do get the benefit of it.

I think the key thing to remember is reduce, reuse, recycle, and make sure it happens in that order. We have to reduce first, then we have to reuse and then we have to recycle. So actually a bag like that would fall into third place there. So reduce, actually, can you carry it in your hands? Do we actually need a bag in the first place? Reuse. I've got a cupboard full of tote bags. I don't need another bag. So it's always really important to remember to reduce, reuse, recycle in that order. There's a couple of comments about bins in the section here.

Someone's saying they use compostable bags that postal items come in to line their food waste bin. That's great. If I do need to use a bin liner, I try and use an old package that I've had from somewhere else that was going to go in the bin anyway. Someone said about making a bin liner with a plastic coating, cleaning and reusing it. That sounds like a great idea. I've never seen that. But that would be brilliant. Someone's also asked about any thoughts about making Ecobricks.

Lucy: Lucie Mann who just did the previous presentation actually did some presentations for us on making Ecobricks so if colleagues are interested I'll pop a link in the chat box in a minute because some of our Go Green champions have started making them and I think so far we're at about 50 bricks. We've been doing it since June. So if you've got the time to do it, it's definitely a good way of making you really think about your plastic consumption. Because since I've been doing it, now when I go to buy toilet rolls, I buy ones that come in a cardboard box because I think I don't want to spend 10 minutes cutting that up and shoving it into a plastic bottle. So it's kind of a way of almost forcing you to think more of environmentally-friendly options.

I'll pop something in the chat for that. I think Melanie's got a question and I think that might have to be the last one. Oh, so she's just making a recommendation. But she has mentioned in there the COVID situation. I just wondered if you guys had any final words on that. Obviously when we were going through the lockdown, and there's still lockdowns happening and various restrictions in place, have you found that there's been any kind of big issues that that's caused you in terms of your plastic diet? Huge. COVID has an absolutely massive impact. The amount of bags, if you're getting supermarket deliveries, not being able to go to the shops so ordering online, and all of the PPE that's involved with going to work and places, plastic has almost exploded because of COVID. It is actually a conversation we had last week. We do go through moments where we feel almost beaten by COVID. How's this actually done us in.

I think I'm going to do the flip side to it and COVID has had some positive effects because I think it's forced people to live a bit differently. You can no longer run to the shop on your way home from work and conveniently pick up some food for dinner, which is where a lot of plastic comes from because

what we found is convenience equals plastic, that really easy to reach for food generally comes in plastic. Because we can't shop like that at the moment, because right at the beginning we were allowed to go to the shops once a week, we had to really plan and we had to think about everything we were going to do. So we were wasting less food, we were buying it in a more sensible way and therefore in some ways we were actually reducing plastic. So some of those habits hopefully will endure past COVID and I think that they will have a positive impact on reducing our plastic usage. So there are some silver linings, if you want to be a bit positive.

COVID hasn't beaten us.

Lucy: I think that's really inspiring because I for one, and I'm sure lots of other people who have said about it in the chat have really found that. I've been faced with actually being at home so often and really seeing what I am using because I'm not stuffing it in a bin and then leaving for work for the day. I'm sat next to it all the time.

We've become responsible for all of our own waste but by staying in one place we've all become aware of actually all this waste that we're creating, we're seeing it in front of us, all of our daily waste. It has been quite an eye opener to see all of that.

Lucy: Right. Well, that was brilliant. Thank you so much, guys. Everybody seems to have really enjoyed the session and found it really helpful. So thank you so much and thank you for the tour of your house. It was brilliant. Thank you very much, guys. Bye, thank you. Bye.