BPI Biodegradable Products Institute
promoting biodegradable products throughout the world

"Biodegradable plastics" are not the Panacea to Solid Waste

Lately, the BPI and its members are seeing an increasing number of "biodegradable" claims, relating to plastic bags and other plastic items. Manufacturer claims include phrases like "biodegrades in landfills" or "reduces the impact of litter because they are biodegradable". The BPI is increasingly concerned by these claims not only in the US but also in Canada.

According to a 2006 consumer survey by the American Chemistry Council, when the term "biodegradable" is used most consumers believe that the product will go away completely and on its own in a year or less:

- *" For most people, this term means that the material is able to decompose or break down naturally (on its own).*
- *Most people believe the material would break down in 1 year or less.*
- *One key attribute assigned to biodegradable by most people is that when it breaks down the material disappears completely - there is nothing left behind.*
  - *– As a result, adults say the material is not harmful to the environment*
- *There is some sense that you can just throw out the biodegradable material and it will dissolve completely, on its own."*

Additionally, the overwhelming majority of consumers believe that these products will "biodegrade" in landfills. Yet, today's landfills are engineered to eliminate moisture and to retard biodegradation. In fact, researchers have found in landfills legible 30 year old newspapers; 5 year old lettuce and 10 year old hotdogs.

The BPI has never seen any scientific data which shows that "biodegradable" plastics will fulfill consumer's expectations under landfill conditions (i.e. breaks down completely into nothing in a 12 months or less).

Rather than focusing on "biodegradability", the BPI and its members strongly believe that manufacturers, consumers and communities should be looking for solutions to solid waste issues that encompass source reduction, reuse and greater use of recycling and composting, all of which divert materials from landfills and incinerators. Additionally, the BPI and its members support a scientific approach, which allows a clear verification of any claims such as application of ASTM 6400 for commercial composting.