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## From bread bag to fencepost: A reflection by Catherine Gibbs

Lockdown has provided me with time to put in place some changes I should have made to reduce my carbon emissions. Knowing that I must do something is not enough. Taking appropriate action necessitates a change in behaviour and that can take time. I needed to research how best to respond to a challenge and then build in repetition until it became part of my day. Lockdown was time to change one thing that's bugged me.

### What To Do With Soft Plastics?

Naturally the end game we want is to use less and less packaging - it's not about recycling more, it's about using less. That's the ultimate end game. In the meantime... every time I walked past the soft plastics recycle bin at the supermarket I used to feel both concerned and guilty.



Concerned - with all the soft plastic passing through the checkouts all day every day. Why was one small bin considered sufficient? Surely 20 bins wouldn't hold the soft plastic wasted on a daily basis?

Guilty – because I'd never used the bin. It's hardly conspicuous. I had a basic sorting system at home but here was an answer for my soft plastic question.

### Time To Improve My Soft Plastic Recycling Process!

Research proved extremely helpful. Here are a few websites I discovered with useful information.

How the bread bags can turn into fenceposts and other info go to the FAQ section.

<https://www.recycling.kiwi.nz/>

How you can be a partner for change.

<https://www.packagingforum.org.nz/soft-plastics-recycling-programme/>

What Countdown supermarkets are promising...

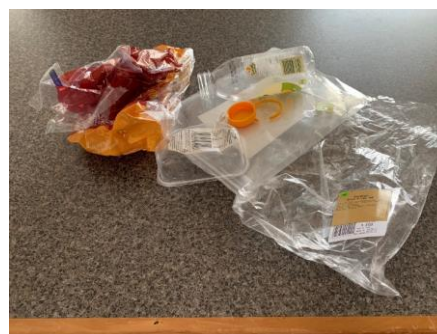
<https://www.countdown.co.nz/community-environment/environmental-sustainability/recycling>

### Taking Action

My list of frequently recycled soft plastic includes: cereal box lining bags; frozen food bags; Bread bags; outer plastic food boxes; birdseed plastic zip bag; toilet paper wrapping; courier envelopes; squeeze pouches; etc.

### Steps towards a change of behaviour

- Empty, clean, and dry then sort all soft plastics.
- Stuff all soft plastics that I could scrunch in my hand into my cotton sausage bag hanging in the kitchen. (I never use cling wrap and use fabric /glass coverings.)



- Once a week take the filled sausage bag together with my carry bags to the supermarket.
- For all other 'soft plastic' such as milk bottles etc. follow the recycle number stamped on the item and bin appropriately. (Small tip – cut the plastic ring around the milk/other juice bottles before recycling. This reduces the risk of a bird or fish dying of strangulation.)

### **Why Bother? Can Very Small Actions Lead To Mighty Changes?**

The climate crisis is a story. We have the opportunity to write the final chapter in the climate crisis story. Our story was unsustainable, unethical, and unCatholic.

Our story has a celebratory ending if each of us never stop praying and responding to the call to change through small actions:

We control what we do next.

What we consume

What we tell our leaders

How we live our lives.

If my bread bags are recycled into fenceposts which help save a few trees while also keeping farm animals out of our degraded waterways – that something!

*Catherine Gibbs is a member of the Integral Ecology Committee of the Wellington Archdiocese Ecology, Justice and Peace Commission*