



## **2007, 2008 and 2009 Plastic Film and Bag Report**

*Prepared for the American Chemistry Council at the Request of  
Los Angeles County Public Works*

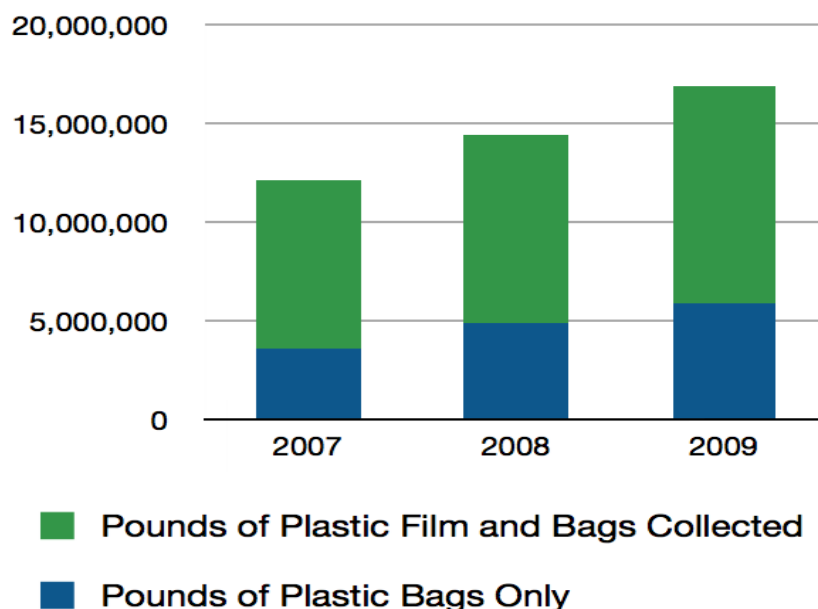
### **Introduction**

Los Angeles County Public Works (LACPW) came to the American Chemistry Council (ACC) in 2009, and again in early 2010, to request its assistance in determining the pounds of plastic film and bags collected for recycling from material recovery facilities (MRFs) in Los Angeles (LA) County in 2007, 2008 and now 2009. The County requested information that would illustrate the percentage of plastic bags collected versus total film, as well as how much of the total film was from the unincorporated areas of LA County.

### **Findings**

There are currently twenty-two single-stream MRFs in LA County. Each MRF was contacted or visited for this report and asked to supply total pounds of plastic film captured, as well as the percentage of the total that was from plastic bags. The percentages of plastic bags are based on each MRFs' in-house data: some do sample testing; others provided their best estimate. Data from twenty of the twenty-two MRFs is represented in this report.

**Pounds of Film and Bags Collected from LA County MRFs**



The data shown is aggregated based on reports from LA County MRFs only. The weight per plastic bag is based on industry standards: 75 bags weigh one pound, therefore a single plastic bag is about 0.213 oz. or 6 grams.

### **Total Volume of Plastic Film and Bags Collected in Los Angeles County**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Pounds of Plastic Film and Bags Collected</b>	<b>12,122,410</b>	<b>14,408,760</b>	<b>16,876,000</b>
<b>Percentage of Plastic Bags Collected</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Pounds of Plastic Bags Only</b>	<b>3,636,723</b>	<b>4,898,978</b>	<b>5,906,600</b>

As indicated above, the amount of plastic film and bags collected for recycling is growing. In fact, the recycling of plastic bags and film grew 39 percent from 2007 to 2009. Significantly, the recycling of plastic bags alone grew 62 percent from 2007 to 2009. Consumers have become accustomed to putting their plastic bags and film into their recycling curbside bins. So whether they actively request them or not, MRFs are receiving bags and film in the recycling stream. It is to their benefit to separate out bags and film because this material would otherwise contaminate the other recyclables and get tangled in their sorting equipment. Since this material is already separated out, it makes the most sense to bale and market the material.

This data shows a dramatic increase in curbside recycling of bags and film in LA County since 2007. In addition to curbside recycling of bags and film, there are approximately 400 large stores that take back bags and film for recycling in LA County. Nationwide, total bag and film recycling, inclusive of all collection methods, has increased by 28 percent since 2005, reaching over 832 million pounds in 2008. Of this, curbside recycling represents only about 4 percent of the total.<sup>1</sup>

#### Market

Every material experienced the export market crash in October 2008. This resulted in buyers of lower-grade plastics discontinuing purchase, or having to find different export markets. The prices for all exported scrap plummeted. Because of the dramatic drop in price, a few MRFs in Los Angeles County decided to temporarily stop pulling their plastic film and bags. Instead, the film and bags ended up in the county's landfills. Despite the crash, and this practice by a few of the MRFs, the volumes continued to grow. Since then, those MRFs have reconsidered their practices and all but two of the MRFs have started pulling and baling plastic film and bags again.

<sup>1</sup> **2008 National Postconsumer Recycled Plastic Bag and Film Report,**  
[http://www.americanchemistry.com/s\\_plastics/sec\\_content.asp?CID=1593&DID=10776](http://www.americanchemistry.com/s_plastics/sec_content.asp?CID=1593&DID=10776)

Volumes from Unincorporated areas

Out of LA County’s twenty-two MRFs, there are only a few that are located within the unincorporated areas of the County. In addition, there are a few other MRFs that receive a small percentage of material from the unincorporated areas. Below is the data indicating the total volume of plastic film and bags collected from these unincorporated areas.

**Total Volume of Plastic Film and Bags Collected from the Unincorporated Areas of Los Angeles County**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>Pounds of Plastic Film and Bags Collected</b>	<b>654,610</b>	<b>1,123,262</b>	<b>916,440</b>
<b>Percentage of Plastic Bags Collected</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Pounds of Plastic Bags Only</b>	<b>130,922</b>	<b>247,117</b>	<b>183,228</b>

The unincorporated numbers also show an increase in volume. However, due to the crash of 2008, and the decision by some MRFs to stop pulling film, the volume for 2009 was affected. Overall, there was a 40 percent increase in plastic bags and film collected from 2007 to 2009. The 2009 numbers were disproportionately affected by the market crash because of the lower volumes and smaller number of MRFs serving the unincorporated areas.

**Los Angeles County MRFs**

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| 1. <b>Allan Company</b> – Baldwin Park Plant                     | 12. <b>Downey Area Recycling &amp; Transfer</b> – Downey |
| 2. <b>Allan Company</b> – Sun Valley Paper in Sun Valley         | 13. <b>Grand Central Recycling</b> – City of Industry    |
| 3. <b>Allan Company</b> – Santa Monica Plant                     | 14. <b>Pomona Valley Recycling</b> – Pomona              |
| 4. <b>Athens Disposal</b> – City of Industry                     | 15. <b>Mission Recycling</b> – Pomona                    |
| 5. <b>American Recycling</b> – Sun Valley                        | 16. <b>Potential Industries</b> – Wilmington             |
| 6. <b>Bestway Recycling</b> – Los Angeles                        | 17. <b>Puente Hills MRF</b> – Whittier                   |
| 7. <b>Bestway Recycling</b> – Los Angeles (Downtown)             | 18. <b>Smurfit Stone Recycling</b> – Torrance            |
| 8. <b>Burbank Recycling</b> – Burbank                            | 19. <b>Waste Management</b> – Pico Rivera                |
| 9. <b>City Fibers</b> – Los Angeles                              | 20. <b>Waste Management</b> – Los Angeles (LA Express)   |
| 10. <b>City Fibers</b> – North Hills                             | 21. <b>Waste Management</b> – Santa Clarita              |
| 11. <b>Community Recycling &amp; Crown Disposal</b> – Sun Valley | 22. <b>Waste Management</b> - Carson                     |