

## Go Greener on Earth Day, Public Health School Urges

April 21, 2008 2:00 AM Madeline Vann  
newwave@tulane.edu

Paper or plastic? To that tired question, the dean's office of the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine is proposing a contemporary answer: reusable grocery bags bearing the school's name and the message "Green at heart since 1912."



The Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine hands out free reusable bags to encourage shoppers to go greener.

The bags will be available in the lobby of the [School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#), which was established in 1912, at 1440 Canal St., today (April 22) for Earth Day from 10 a.m. to noon while supplies last.

Faculty, students and staff who want to wear their green hearts on their grocery bags are limited to one free bag per person. The bags also can be purchased from the dean's office in suite 2430 for \$2.50 each.

The concept of a reusable grocery bag featuring the school originates with the Office of the Dean. Katie Bowler, senior program manager for communications, developed the tagline and implemented the bag production and distribution while designer Sarah Chesnutt created the art.

"The idea came about from the growing popularity and need for reusable bags, especially since Whole Foods will no longer offer plastic bags as of Earth Day this year, and other stores are likely to follow suit. We thought it a cute, progressive solution to the growing need for reusable products," says Bowler. She expects the bags also will be used for student recruitment and other promotional activities.

"One of the 'mantras' of public health is that we should model the behaviors that we want people to practice. Schools of public health must lead by example to improve environmental health," observes Charles Miller, associate professor of environmental health sciences.

Reusable bags help improve the environment in a number of ways, according to Miller. "It takes energy and money to produce, transport and dispose of bags. A reusable bag is made, transported and degraded once per many cycles of your purchases, whereas one-time-use bags have a financial, energetic and environmental cost every time you purchase something," he explains.

"Making, transporting and disposing of plastic bags introduces long-lived pollutants into the environment. Making, transporting and disposing or classically recycling paper bags also pollutes the water and air."

In the United States, shoppers carry approximately 100 billion plastic bags out of stores every year. Twelve million barrels of oil are needed to make that many plastic grocery bags, according to the *Washington Post*. Less than one percent of those bags are recycled. In contrast, every reusable bag has the potential to prevent the use of 1,000 plastic bags.

For a brief description of the life cycles of paper and plastic bags, visit the [Washington Post](#) website.