

Bestseller has formed a joint venture with the Indian company Conserve, which employs the poorest of the poor from the slums of Delhi to make high-fashion products such as handbags, footwear, and jewellery. The designer products are made from plastic waste collected from Delhi's streets and thereby ensuring a clean and safe environment as well as giving very poor people a livelihood.

Anita Ahuja from Conserve says, "The material we make at Conserve is called HRP (Handmade Recycled Plastic). HRP, as the name suggests, is handmade, with a 'natural' feel, texture, and colour giving the product an attractive appearance and feel. Each sheet of HRP is qualified to be called a work of art. Being water and stain resistant, products made from this material have a long shelf life. A wide range of useful and attractive products has been designed by Indian and International designers, which have received an enthusiastic response from various International buyers."

"Recycling plastic bags in this manner offers only a motivation to dispose off them correctly; it is not a perfect solution and should not be accepted as an endorsement for continued use of them."

She continues, "Plastic bags undoubtedly offer convenience but are an unnecessary environmental nuisance and have a dismal record of causing suffering both to humans and animals. Hopefully, one day, the need for these is no longer felt. But, until then, all efforts have to be made to ensure that these visual eyesores are collected from the garbage dumps and recycled appropriately."

Making the products is a 4 step process, which is more energy efficient and environmentally friendly than conventional recycling processes: First, the plastic is collected, washed, dried, and separated by colour by a selected group of people. Conserve buys the sorted plastic at a fixed price which is higher than the average market price. A number of families survive on these earnings alone. Secondly, a machine presses the plastic bags into thicker and more durable sheets. No dyes or inks are required. It takes about 60 plastic bags to make one sheet.

Making designer bags

out of urban plastic waste



Third, the sheets are cut, lined with cloth, and stitched or moulded into various products. The production is done by several preferred suppliers who are currently working on the implementation of fair trade principles (IFAT). Finally, the products undergo quality control, are packaged, and prepared for shipping to other countries.

The present range includes day bags, handbags, evening bags, beach bags, footwear, belts, jewellery as well as other fashion and interior accessories. These products are being marketed as high-end fashion accessories and are available at various international shops.



For more information about Conserve please visit www.conserveindia.org

