

An inconvenient wrapper, or what Al Gore didn't tell you about SunChips bags and climate change

Posted At : October 7, 2010 3:12 PM | Posted By : Mike McGrail

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The tissues next to the sink in the men's room at work taunt me every time I stand at the slow-working hand dryer waiting for my hands to stop dripping. It only takes about 15-20 seconds under the dryer until I can go back to work, but drying my hands on tissues is even faster – maybe three seconds. Nevertheless, I resist the siren call of processed wood pulp. When I use the hand dryer, I'm not throwing anything out. Since the climate change debate started, I've been obsessed with throwing away as little as possible in favor of the "reduce, reuse, recycle" mantra. So I stand there with my hands under the dryer even though the paper product would be more convenient.

Convenience: a perfect segue from hand drying to junk food bags.

Frito Lay, maker of those quasi-healthy crunchy snacks called SunChips, recently embraced the "recycle" part of the 3R mantra by packaging SunChips in a compostable bag. That's quite a leap up the sustainability index from the plastic bags that most snack food comes in. Most plastic **never never degrades completely**, even in direct sunlight, because there's nothing in plastic for microorganisms to eat. The compostable bags, by contrast, can be gone in a couple of weeks because they're made of plant matter that microorganisms like just fine. Considering the amount of snack food Americans eat, Frito Lay's biodegradable SunChips bag was definitely a step in the right direction.

It was a step right back when Frito Lay announced this week that it's discontinuing the compostable bag because customers think it's – waaaaaaaiiiit for it – **too loud**. Apparently, the compostable bag's molecular structure makes it snap, crackle and pop lustily every time a chip junkie sticks his/her paw into a handful of no-trans-fat flavor. Facebook groups like "I wanted SunChips but my roommate was sleeping..." and "Nothing is louder than a SunChips bag" cropped

up in protest. Customers complained to Frito Lay, which decided to replace the compostable bags with plastic on all SunChip flavors except the original.

First of all, what kind of wusses have Americans become when the crinkling of a food bag turns us catatonic? How loud can one bag of chips be? Are people bleeding out of their ears because they had to go for that one extra handful of SunChips with lunch? No matter. A vocal slice of the populace don't want their late-night munchie attacks broadcast over the SunChip BagNet, so **30 million plastic bags are heading back into the waste stream**.

This is the wrong message for corporations to send the public. As a society, Americans need to throw away less. What we do throw away should be as biodegradable as possible. Packaging is a major contributor to pollution and landfill clutter. Frito Lay's initial effort to make a mainstream consumer product more environmentally sustainable was the right message to the general public. Snuffing it wasn't.

Here's a radical solution for all of the people who think the SunChip bag is too loud. If you don't want anyone to know you're having a private moment with the SunChips bag – waaaaaaaiiiit for it – take it OUTSIDE before you open it. You'll get some fresh air with your healthy SunChips and maybe burn a few of them off as you walk from the couch to the porch for a fix. Ask Frito Lay to bring back the biodegradable bag. It might not be the convenient solution, but it's the right one.

Now if you'll pardon me, I have to hit the men's room with my new fast but environmentally sustainable hand-drying solution: the backs of my pant legs.