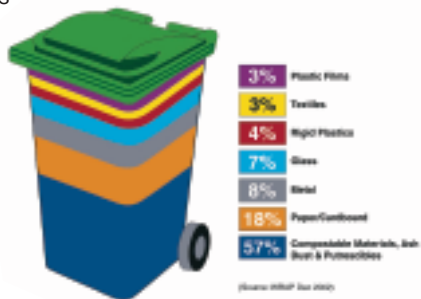


# THE HOLES IN THE ARGUMENT FOR A CARRIER BAG TAX

## WHY PLASTIC CARRIER BAGS ARE THE BEST ENVIRONMENTAL CHOICE YOU CAN MAKE

### 1: LITTER

Plastic carrier bags are not a litter problem. Most litter on our streets is snack food packaging, bottles and cans, cigarette ends and similar. Plastic bags of all kinds make up **far less than 1% of litter on our streets.** Banning or taxing plastic carrier bags will make no difference to the volume of litter on our streets.

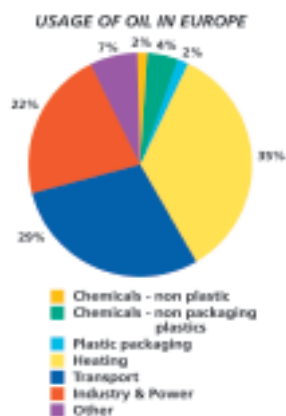


### 2: LANDFILL

Even if plastic carrier bags end up in landfill they take up an **insignificant amount of space – around 0.3%.** The materials that take up most space in our landfills are paper and wood-based products, putrescible waste and construction debris. These are the materials most likely to contribute to greenhouse emissions and groundwater pollution. And if, as in Eire, taxing plastic bags means people switch to paper, there will be a greater volume of degradable waste going to landfill – in direct contravention of the EU Landfill Directive.

### 3: FINITE OIL RESOURCES

Forget the popular environmental “spin”. Compared with alternatives, lightweight high-strength plastics represent by far the best overall use of valuable earth resources for thousands of everyday applications. **Only about 2% of all the oil consumed in Europe is used for all plastic packaging** – and plastic carriers are a very small part of this percentage. The vast majority of oil – nearly 85% – is burned as fuel in cars and lorries or for power for heating and industry. Carrier bag taxes make no difference to global oil consumption.



### 4: ENERGY

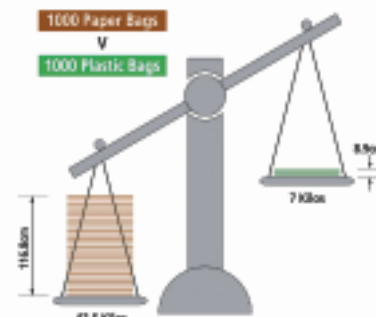
Independent studies show that the energy used to make and distribute plastic carrier bags is far less than for the equivalent size of paper bag. Plastic films are the most energy-efficient material we can produce. After use, the latent energy in plastic can be recovered by re-use, recycling or via waste to energy systems as widely practised throughout the EU and advocated by recent DEFRA/Birmingham University studies. Across Europe, it is estimated that 30 million tonnes of oil each year is saved by burning waste plastic in clean, energy from waste plants. **One incinerated carrier bag will keep a 60 watt light bulb burning for an hour!**

### 5: RESOURCE MINIMISATION

Today's plastic bags use 70% less plastic than 20 years ago yet still remain as strong and durable. What other industry has achieved this reduction in material used? **A plastic bag weighs about 7g, yet can carry up to 20kgs - more than 2500 times its own weight!** Why penalise an industry that has one of the best track records of all in resource minimisation?

### 6: TRANSPORTATION, STORAGE AND FUEL EMISSIONS

Plastic is by far the lightest of all carrier bag materials - so it takes much less fuel to transport and creates less damaging and carcinogenic exhaust emissions. **A paper bag weighs roughly six times more than plastic, is about four times more expensive and takes up to ten times more storage space.** Plastic has genuine environmental advantages across its full life cycle.



### 7: RE-USE AND RECYCLING

No other so-called “disposable” item is re-used as much as the plastic carrier bag. DEFRA research shows that 80% of people re-use single trip plastic carrier bags in the household. Replacing these bags takes more resources and energy – **a plastic bag tax introduced in Ireland resulted in a massive increase of 300-500% in the sale of plastic refuse bags and bin liners!** The plastic films industry has an outstanding recycling record – more than 300,000 tonnes of plastic packaging every year is recycled by our industry. That is twice the weight of carrier bags we use in the UK!

### 8: CONVENIENCE AND RETAIL THEFT

Plastic carrier bags are successful simply because they are cheap, hygienic convenient and versatile. Discriminating against plastic bags will also discriminate against the elderly, low income and non car-owning shoppers. Plastic carriers also provide visible evidence of payment for the goods. In Ireland, the plastic bag tax has encouraged theft from the shelves (as shoppers bring their own bags into the store) as well as theft through “push outs” (wheeling out trolleys of unbagged goods without paying) and even the theft of wire baskets and trolleys. **We estimate that increased theft has cost retailers more than the tax has generated in Eire.**

### 9: EU COMPETITION LAW AND BARRIERS TO TRADE

Taxing or banning plastic carrier bags would discriminate against plastic compared with other materials. It could represent a serious restraint on trade – **putting our businesses and jobs at risk – and for no environmental gain.** A plastic bag tax would effectively close down UK carrier bag manufacturers for no good reason - killing off jobs and wasting millions of pounds of investment which has ironically been spent on meeting UK legislation for better health, safety and a cleaner environment.



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# SIX FACTS YOU WON'T BE TOLD ABOUT THE IRISH CARRIER BAG TAX

## 1: INCREASED USE OF PLASTIC IN EIRE

The Irish claim the use of plastic carrier bags has declined by over 90%. DEFRA says 80% of plastic carrier bags are re-used at least once in the home. That is why the reduction in carrier bags in Ireland has been replaced by an increase in the use of heavier gauge bin liners, refuse sacks and nappy disposal bags.

**One plastic bag company in Drogheda, County Louth, Eire** (maker of 19 types of bin bags) states "We've experienced a growth of 300-400%. It's been phenomenal. You can trace it back to when the bag levy came in." He also stated that he now had to employ workers on double shifts to cope with the demand.

**The Irish Examiner Newspaper found the following:**

**Tesco** – 77% increase in pedal bin liner sales; **Superquinn** (Ireland's biggest supermarket) – 84% increase in nappy bag sales; **Superquinn** – 13.5% increase in bin bag sales; **Supervalu/Centra** – 25% increase in nappy bag sales; **Supervalu/Centra** – 75% increase in swing bin liner sales.

**PIFA statistics derived from Customs & Excise**

show no statistically significant change in the tonnage of plastic bags made and shipped to Ireland after the tax than before it. (Not counting the increased home production noted above.)

**So, if just as much plastic is being used after the tax, what is the environmental gain?**

## 2: NO EVIDENCE OF LITTER REDUCTION

The original premise for the Irish Tax was to reduce litter but UK litter surveys suggest that plastic bags comprise less than 1% of all litter, so it is simply not possible for a plastic bag tax to have any significant effect on litter.

**In the two years since taxing plastic bags, there is no evidence in published litter surveys of any reduction in litter in Eire.**

## 3: NO CHANGE IN WASTE GOING TO LANDFILL

Those who proposed a bag tax said it would reduce landfill. But the UK Industry Council for Packaging in the Environment (INCPEN) and HM Treasury state that plastic carrier bags comprise around 0.3% of all household waste.

**Where is the evidence of any reduction in the amount of plastic bags of any kind going into landfill in Ireland since the introduction of the Irish tax more than two years ago?**

## 4: SWITCHING TO PAPER IS WORSE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Plastic bag taxes encourage more environmentally damaging alternatives such as paper. But don't take our word for it. Here is evidence given to a DEFRA hearing on 20 August 2002.

**Major fashion retailer:**

"(The switch to paper bags in Eire) has meant increased transport and storage (impacts). There is a higher incidence of double bagging (of paper) for strength. In total more bags are needed and used since the switch."

**Major department store chain:**

"There is a problem with the plastic carrier bag tax as previously we used to send four pallets of plastic bags to Ireland each week. Now we have to send four x 40 foot containers (of paper alternatives). Ironically, as the paper bags are water sensitive, we must send them wrapped in what amounts to large plastic bags to ensure their safe delivery."

## 5: INCREASED RETAIL THEFT

The Irish say that retailers welcome a plastic bag tax because they can make more profit by not having to purchase bags to give away free. But retailers now suffer administration costs and increased theft. Plastic bag taxes not only discriminate against the elderly, low income groups, those with mobility difficulties and those without cars – they also lead to an increase in crime:

**RGDATA**

is a trade body representing 4,500 small to medium retailers in Ireland. It has calculated that the tax on plastic bags – which it describes as a "costly nightmare" – is responsible for every retail member losing 450 in stolen wire baskets each month. This equates to a total loss for small retailers alone in Ireland in one year of 24.3 million. There is the additional hidden environmental impact as these baskets/trolleys have a very high production, transportation and litter impact.

**ACS**

(Association of Convenience Stores) represents 25,000 neighbourhood retailers of between 500 square feet and 3,000 square feet. Their evidence said "(although) our customers are less likely to need a bag because they are purchasing only a few items, an increase in shoplifting from small stores has also been attributed to the Irish levy. The absence of bags makes it difficult to identify customers who have made a purchase."

**The Irish Retail Trade Journal "Shelf Life"**

of January 2003 reports major increases in "push outs" where shoppers fill trolleys with high value goods (no carrier bags needed or supplied) and walk straight out – estimated cost is 10 million annually.

**Dublin Supermarket Manager:**

"When plastic bags were free, you never saw consumers leaving a store with products just piled into a trolley. But with the introduction of the bag tax it's now quite common to see this."

**PIFA**

surveyed 4,500 head offices of UK retailers on their views and 79% of those who responded opposed a carrier bag tax.

**If the Irish Carrier Bag tax brings no environmental benefit, forces consumers to buy more plastic bin bags and leads to increased crime, what is its big purpose?**

## 6: MASSIVE INCREASED COSTS TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

In many cases, those who advocate taxing plastic bags expect local authorities to bear a large part of the burden in administering and policing such a tax. Yet there is no benefit whatsoever to the local authority.

- No improvement in litter problems.
- No reduction in waste going to landfill.
- No net income (after administration costs) to spend on environmental improvements.

**So why should local authorities be expected to bear the cost of misguided green politics? Since the debate began in 2002, DEFRA have NOT supported calls for a carrier bag tax.**

**The Cabinet Office Waste Strategy Unit did NOT adopt calls for a carrier bag tax. HM Treasury rejected the imposition of carrier bag tax. So why should local authorities be asked to support such calls?**



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