

ISSUES BRIEFING FOR SCOTTISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

WHY A BAG TAX WOULD CAUSE MORE DAMAGE TO SCOTLAND'S ENVIRONMENT



What would happen if a plastic bag tax was introduced in Scotland?

- Scottish people would turn to heavier, more environmentally damaging alternatives such as paper. These use more energy and produce more pollution in production, release more carcinogenic exhaust emissions during transportation and release greenhouse gases when they degrade in landfill. And don't forget - more degradables in landfill directly contravenes local authority obligations under the EU Landfill Directive.
- Scottish people would have no choice but to buy up to five times more bin liners and rubbish sacks. This happened in Eire simply because 80% of households re-use their carrier bags for this and other purposes like dog droppings collection.
- Scottish Local Authorities would have to take on specialist staff and set up systems within their Trading Standards teams to police and prosecute retailers who did not comply with the tax. This would mean enormous hidden costs - local taxpayers' money - for no environmental benefit.
- The amount of litter on Scottish streets would not change because plastic carrier bags constitute less than 1% of litter.
- Scottish local authorities will have to implement the world's highest tax levy - 1400% on the cost of a plastic bag.
- Scottish Local Authorities will be directly discriminating against low income groups, the elderly and infirm and those without motor cars. This is because the lightweight plastic carrier is by far the lightest and lowest cost (and best environmental) solution to getting shopping home.
- As in Eire, a Scottish bag tax would generate virtually no net income for environmental projects because most of the tax would go on administering it.
- Up to 1,000 Scottish jobs would be directly lost.



Why a Bag Tax won't work in Scotland:



WHY ARE PLASTIC CARRIER BAGS BEING UNFAIRLY ATTACKED.

Although billions of plastic retail bags are used around the world, their lightweight, low volume characteristics mean that some carelessly discarded bags will inevitably be blown into our natural environment. This high visibility

profile of bags caught in trees and bushes led to claims, in some countries, that the bags were a major contributor to our **global litter problems**.

Subsequent claims included the idea that plastic carrier bags are a major part of the **volume of landfill**. It has also been said that plastic bags are bad for the environment because they are not degradable and, in contradiction, that they will eventually degrade to pollute our land and water sources.

None of the science supports these claims, yet headline writers, certain politicians and some less well-informed environmentalists have all seized the opportunity to influence public opinion by making calls for various bans and taxes on the plastic carrier bag.

The following key facts are designed to help answer what have emerged as the main concerns of those who promote a bag tax and to help informed debate in preference to emotive reaction.



Carrier Bag Consortium

The Best Environmental Choice

www.carrierbagtax.com



British Polythene Industries PLC

1 LITTER

THE CLAIM

To justify a tax, it was originally claimed that plastic bags are a large part of our litter problem. The fact is that far less than 1% of all litter comprises plastic carrier bags. So banning or taxing plastic carriers will make no difference to the problem of litter.



Our re-use and recycle campaign.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 We are actively encouraging all our retail customers to include slogans on their bags to encourage people to **re-use and recycle** their carrier bags. And a number of big supermarkets have already taken up this idea.
- 2 Some retailers are also placing large **recycle bins** in their stores for plastic carriers that are no longer required.
- 3 We are also encouraging the recycling industry to find more and more ways of converting these unwanted bags into **long life uses** such as benches, street cones, bollards and building products.
- 4 The plastics industry also supports **better information and education** of the consequences of dropping litter and participates in national debate on the issue. The fact is that almost every plastic carrier bag is taken home full of shopping, not thrown on to our streets. The main components of litter have been shown to be fast food wrappings, drinks bottles and cans and cigarette-related items.
- 5 We support **harsher penalties for littering** of all types and national publicity campaigns which show the cost to society which litter collection and waste disposal imposes.
- 6 We also use education display materials and leaflets to encourage children and teachers to understand better the role of plastic films in society and the need to **dispose of plastic responsibly**.

Our schools education campaign.



2 LANDFILL

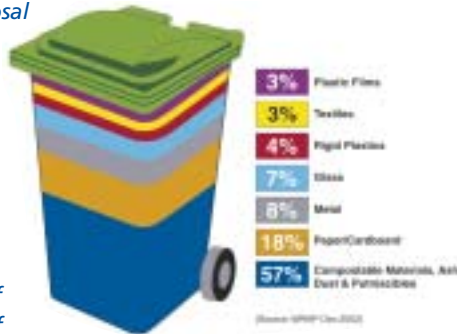
3 RESOURCE AND WASTE MINIMISATION



THE CLAIMS

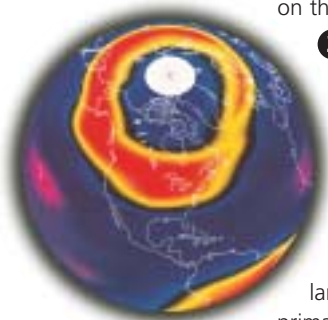
A number of false claims have been made stating that carrier bags make a significant contribution to our landfill problems. It has even been suggested that polythene bags do not degrade and, in contradiction, that when they do they are capable of leaching toxic chemicals into our critical land and water sources. These claims are untrue and seriously misleading - in fact, plastic bags play a crucial role in waste disposal even in the landfill site.

Most waste professionals already know that plastic bags are an insignificant percentage of the volume of landfill. In fact plastic carriers of all types comprise less than 1% of landfill and all plastic films form only 3% of the contents of our dustbins.



WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 We are encouraging waste professionals and the media to play a more **active role** in public education on the real composition of waste.
- 2 We are committed to producing information leaflets like this one and press releases which are based on **facts not fiction**.
- 3 We have consistently supported the **EU Landfill Directive** which specifically legislates to reduce the large amount of degradable materials - including paper and putrescibles which form the largest part of landfill - as these are more likely to be the primary sources of greenhouse gas emissions - arguably our largest global environmental problem.
- 4 We have argued against the adoption of so-called **degradable carrier bags**. Although degradable bags have a part to play in specialist applications such as compost bags, they break the first rule of sustainability in that they are created with the deliberate intention of wasting valuable earth resources. Landfill sites are not designed to be biological reactors and even paper buried in landfill may not degrade unless the conditions are right.
- 5 We have argued that plastic bags in landfill act as a **crucial stabilising influence** and that polyethylene **does not contain toxic chemicals** capable of leaching into our land or water courses.
- 6 We have pointed out to our politicians and environmental campaigners that diverting public attention towards insignificant issues like supermarket carriers severely damages our chances of legislating to tackle the **macro environmental issues** that threaten the balance of life on our planet and future generations.

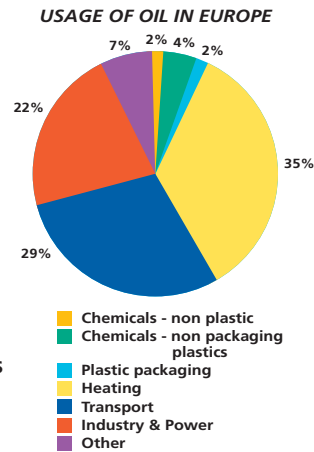


THE CLAIMS

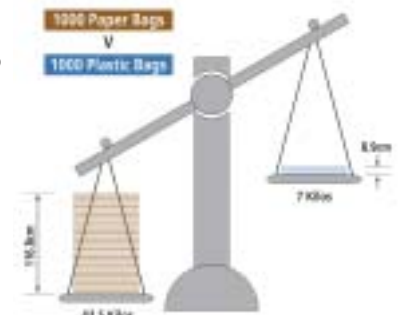
It is suggested that because plastic bags are derived from oil, a finite earth resource, we should avoid plastic bags to save oil. It is also often claimed that plastic bags make a significant net addition to the waste produced by society. Neither claim is true.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 We have provided facts which show that if we stop using plastic bags we are likely to **increase not decrease our drain on oil reserves**. Only 2% of all oil consumed in Europe is used for ALL plastic packaging (and carrier bags are a very small part of this total).
- 2 We have stated that if we drive people to **heavier alternatives** such as paper (which has six times the weight and takes up ten times the space) we will incur major increases in the need for **transportation, handling and storage**. This has already happened in Eire where one retailer increased bag shipments up to tenfold when he substituted paper for plastic carriers.



- 3 We pointed out that the same bag tax in Ireland reduced plastic carrier bags by 90% but **increased the demand for bin liners typically by 250%!**
- 4 Even during manufacture, research by Winnipeg University shows that paper bags require **significantly more energy and pollution in production** than plastic alternatives.
- 5 We have also showed that in countries like Denmark where 50% of all domestic waste is incinerated to create electricity and district heating, the inclusion of high calorific value plastic film waste in the process helps dramatically **reduce the need for oil**. Extrapolated across Europe, it is estimated that 30 million tonnes of oil each year is saved by burning waste plastics in energy from waste plants.



4 WILDLIFE ISSUES

5 REDUCE, RE-USE AND RECYCLE

THE CLAIMS

Everyone who cares about our environment and our fragile eco systems will have been affected by reports that plastic bags can choke marine wildlife such as whales and even cattle grazing close to landfill sites.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 Although the risk of such accidents is infinitesimally small, and reports are largely anecdotal, we actively encourage the **safe and socially responsible disposal** of all plastic waste and we strongly support the imposition of legal penalties for those who carelessly discard waste of all types.
- 2 We also participate, wherever possible, in helping to educate the public on the **need to prevent littering**.
- 3 The problem of waste affecting wildlife in proximity to landfill sites needs concerted efforts by site operators to **minimise the risk** of small, lightweight items of all types being carried by high winds.
- 4 We actively **discourage degradable polymers** for plastic bags as these are far more likely to break down into tiny particles which can be ingested by birds and small mammals.
- 5 Plastic film is **essential in farming and agriculture** in applications ranging from polythene tunnels to silage wrap and mulch film, all of which considerably improves output of food and reduces the need for fertilizers as well as cutting the costs of farming. Many such applications include high levels of recycled plastic.



Plastic film recycling.

THE CLAIMS

There is a popular misconception that plastic bags cannot be recycled and are hardly ever re-used. It has also been suggested that if we stopped using so many plastic bags, the environment would be much better off. But none of these suggestions holds up to rigorous scrutiny.



WHAT WE ARE DOING

- 1 We have promoted the fact that plastic carrier bags can be used again for a wide variety of purposes around the home. This has had a very positive effect over the years and recent Government research shows that **four out of five households are now re-using their plastic carrier bags** for everything from bin liners to school dinner bags and dog dropping collections.
- 2 Our industry already **recovers or reprocesses** more than 250,000 tonnes of plastic films which would otherwise enter the UK waste stream.
- 3 For many years we have encouraged the collection of transit wrap film and similar plastics from retail stores. Now some of the larger retailers are installing **carrier bag collection bins** so that our industry can transform unwanted bags into useful long-life items.
- 4 Our industry has also harnessed advanced polymer processing technologies to **dramatically reduce the amount of material going into a typical plastic bag**. In this way, we now produce carrier bags which need 70% less material than 20 years ago, yet are just as strong.
- 5 This minimisation through technology across all plastic packaging has effectively diverted 150,000 tonnes of plastic from our waste stream every year. So our industry record is one of the best when it comes to contributing to material minimisation.



WHY NONE OF US CAN DO WITHOUT PLASTIC PACKAGING, BAGS AND SACKS.

BAGS AND SACKS IN WASTE MANAGEMENT

Plastic bags and sacks have become an essential and universal tool in the **safe containment** of waste at all stages of the waste management process, from localised collection through to disposal.

In this role, plastic waste sacks and bin liners for commercial, domestic and clinical waste disposal are playing a significant and continuous role in the virtual elimination of waste-related **public health** outbreaks.

Since their widespread introduction some forty years ago, plastic bags and sacks have provided the waste management professional with the lowest cost, lowest volume method of localised waste containment with the **lowest overall environmental impacts**.



Polytunnels promote healthy growth.



BAGS AND SACKS IN FOOD AND RETAILING

Around 60% of everything we buy in the supermarket is **packaged for protection** by plastic film. This acts as an effective barrier to the ingress of moisture and other external contaminants including air-borne bacteria - as well as helping keep food fresh for consumption through processes such as modified atmosphere packaging (MAP).

Plastic retail bags are the simplest form of protective packaging and play an important role in our ability to **reduce food wastage** to around 3% compared with more than 50% in the undeveloped world. Such high levels of wasted food would be catastrophic to the waste stream and waste management infrastructure. A study by Colombia University, USA, established a direct correlation between increased use of plastic packaging and reduced wastage of food.

PLASTIC BAGS AND SACKS FOR OUR GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Every day, lives are saved around the world because **blood and plasma** products have been preserved and delivered in plastic bags.

Every day, potentially **hazardous products** are made safe by containment in plastic film bags, sacks and packaging during transit and handling.

Every day, **landfill sites** are lined with plastic film; **new buildings** are made damp proof with plastic film; **crops and essential staple foods** are grown under the protection of plastic film.



Blood bags - a critical life saving application.

Plastic sacks for safe disposal.

All of these applications are critical to life in an increasingly populated world. And all of these products are made by the plastic films industry.

Bans, taxes or restrictions on the retail carrier bag bring no net gain for the environment.



This leaflet has been produced to help promote informed debate.
It is kindly sponsored by one of Scotland's largest public companies -
Europe's leading producer of polyethylene film



British Polythene Industries PLC

Please ask for more information from



Carrier Bag Consortium

The Best Environmental Choice

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