

# WHY THE IDEA OF A CARRIER BAG TAX IS RUBBISH

A Guide for Environment and Waste Management Professionals

## USING OLD OR NON-PLASTIC CARRIER BAGS WON'T PRESENT A PROBLEM TO HEALTH

The re-use of old plastic, cotton or paper carrier bags for your food shopping could present a serious risk to public health. At present, free plastic supermarket bags come fresh from the factory and have been hygienically packed until they are opened for the shopping. The process of manufacture has made the bag entirely safe for carrying food.

Now imagine that, rather than pay a carrier bag tax, you actually remembered to take to the supermarket a few old bags that have already been used. What have they been used for? Meat, fish, petfoods? Or even worse, medicines, disinfectant, bleach? And in between times, have the children found these old carriers useful for school sports kit and goodness knows what else? Now you're packing them with fresh food for the family!

With no benefit to the environment, is any of this worth the risk to you and your children?

## SURELY THE ANSWER IS TO SWITCH TO DEGRADABLE PLASTIC CARRIER BAGS?

Not at all, in fact degradable polymers could turn out to be very bad for the environment. They may sound like a perfect answer to litter and landfill problems but you should be very cautious before they believing all of the green claims being made.

Firstly, those who are committed to sound environmental practice will know that degradable plastics break the first rule of sustainability by using up valuable raw materials, energy and earth resources which are deliberately designed to go to waste.

And they clearly provide no solution to local litter problems since any form of degradability can take many months to complete even when the conditions are ideal.

Degradable bags do not reduce the volume of waste going to landfill and may indeed create problems of instability and emissions. Landfill sites are not designed to be biological reactors. There are also grave concerns that such materials must not be allowed to break down into small fragments of plastics that animals and birds can eat.

Finally, if degradable products find their way into established recycling facilities they could cause serious damage and destroy valuable recyclate markets that are based on consistent quality. If used at all they would need to be clearly marked and separated.



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It's been suggested that a tax is charged on every plastic carrier bag we're given at the supermarket checkout. It's being claimed this tax will solve our litter problem and help the environment. So, on the face of it, is a tax on plastic bags a good idea?

In fact it's a very bad idea. Bad for the environment. Bad for ordinary shoppers. Bad for British jobs. And it could even be bad for your health. Find out why.



If the Government wants to reduce litter, why single out carrier bags which account for far less than 1% of the problem? Why not get tough on all litter?

If the Government wants to raise money for the environment, why introduce a tax that people will do anything to avoid paying, and which penalises an industry with one of the best environmental track records?

If the Government wants to reduce rubbish going to landfill, why not tax by far the biggest part of landfill – junk mail, newspapers and other paper-based products? One Sunday newspaper can weigh the same as six months supply of carrier bags for the average family.

Take a few minutes to look at the evidence and we think you will come to the conclusion that a plastic bag tax could do more damage to the environment, make no difference to our litter or landfill problem, add more to the cost of living, wreck British jobs and businesses – and could even jeopardise our health.

## Is this really what you want?

Please read our views and let us know how you feel by returning the comment card.



**Carrier Bag Consortium**

*Making Life Easier to Handle*

[www.carrierbagtax.com](http://www.carrierbagtax.com)



## A CARRIER BAG TAX WOULD SOLVE OUR LITTER PROBLEM AND HELP REDUCE LANDFILL WASTE



Plastic carrier bags are not a litter problem in the and there is absolutely no evidence that they ever have been. In fact most litter on our streets is fast food packaging, bottles, cigarette ends and similar. It is estimated that FAR less than 1% of litter comprises plastic bags of any kind. So reducing the number of plastic carrier bags we use will make no difference to the amount of litter on our streets.

Even if carrier bags end up in landfill they take up an insignificant amount of space, yet provide essential extra stability. The materials that take up most space in our landfills are paper and wood-based products and putrescible waste. These are also the materials most likely to become major contributors to greenhouse emissions and groundwater pollution. Even so-called biodegradable products won't degrade in landfill sites if the conditions aren't right and in anycase, an EU Directive now requires a drastic reduction in degradables going to landfill - so why encourage more? The use of biodegradable bags, whilst suitable for applications such as home composting, could also seriously contaminate established recycling programmes.



## CARRIER BAGS WASTE VALUABLE EARTH RESOURCES



Forget the popular environmental 'spin'. Compared with alternatives, lightweight high-strength plastics represent by far the best 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 film packaging – and plastic carriers are a very small part of even this percentage. The vast majority of oil – nearly 85% - is burned as fuel in cars and lorries or for heating and power. A carrier bag tax will make no real difference to oil consumption.
- Plastic carriers use 70% less plastic than 20 years ago yet still remain as strong. What other industry has achieved this reduction in material used? And why penalise an industry that has one of the best track records of all?
- Plastic carrier bags are re-used time and time again. The Government's own estimates suggest that four out of five people re-use single trip plastic carriers in the household. Replacing these bags would cost more in resources and energy - a plastic carrier bag tax introduced elsewhere is resulting in a massive increase in sales of refuse bags and bin liners! So a tax is likely to mean more plastic is produced, not less! And plastic film is recyclable just like glass and metal cans. So why not encourage markets for recycled carrier bags?
- The energy usage for plastic carrier bags is far less than for the equivalent paper bag. In fact plastic films are just about the most energy-efficient packaging material produced today. Even after use and re-use, we can recover this energy through clean, safe energy-from waste plants to provide district heating and electricity for homes, hospitals and schools as widely practised in Denmark, Switzerland, in fact, throughout the EU.
- Plastic is the lightest of all carrier bag materials - so it takes much less fuel to transport and creates less damaging exhaust emissions than any alternative. A paper bag weighs roughly six times more than a plastic carrier, is four times more expensive and takes up ten times more space for storage and landfill. Plastic has genuine environmental advantages across its full life cycle.

