

Levy on Single-use Carrier Bags

The Government has announced that it will levy a 5p charge on all single-use plastic bags in England with effect from October 2015. There is already a similar 5p charge on single-use bags in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Paper bags are a viable alternative to plastic as the fibre-based packaging material used to produce the paper bags is sourced from sustainably managed forests. They are also readily recyclable at end of life.

The Government has stated that the plastic bag charge is, "a targeted, proportionate approach to the problem of carrier bag distribution and littering". It has indicated that "it will therefore continue to focus on plastic bags and not on paper bags". According to government information, paper bags make up less than 0.1% of carrier bags distributed in the UK by the seven major supermarket retailers.

Existing Charges for Carrier Bags

In 2002, Ireland introduced a levy of 15 cents (13p) on plastic bags, which rose to 22 cents (18p) in 2007. The proceeds from the levy go back to the Irish government and are put into an Environment Fund. It has been estimated that usage of plastic carrier bags in Ireland has fallen by over 90% since the introduction of the levy.

Since 2011, there has been a minimum charge in Wales of 5p on single-use carrier bags, including paper bags. The Welsh government has a voluntary agreement with organisations under which the proceeds of the charge are given to good causes. The charge has shown significant success, reducing the number of carrier bags given out in the country by some 81%, according to government figures.

Northern Ireland has a minimum charge of 5p on single-use carrier bags, in force since 2013. This applies to single-use bags made from plastic, paper, plant-based materials or natural starch. The proceeds from the charge go back to the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment, with around £1 million being allocated so far to provide funding for communities and organisations to develop local environmental projects.

CPI Position:

- The use of paper bags, particularly from renewable, recyclable sources, is a better alternative for the environment, as they are biodegradable, compostable and recyclable. The majority of plastic bags are still being made from Polyethylene (PE), which is made from oil; they often end up in landfill and can take hundreds of years to break down, and
- The introduction of a levy in England could represent a great opportunity for the paper and packaging industry to push the usage of fibre-based packaging and, in turn, give the industry a plus in terms of its environmental sustainability.

Further Information

Further information is available from Andy Barnetson, Director of Packaging Affairs, on 01793 889602 or email abarnetson@paper.org.uk.

Confederation of Paper Industries

- The Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI) is the leading trade association representing the UK's Paper-based Industries, comprising recovered paper merchants, paper and board manufacturers and converters, corrugated packaging producers, and makers of soft tissue papers.
- CPI represents an industry with an aggregate annual turnover of £6.5 billion, 25,000 direct and more than 100,000 indirect employees.
- For facts on the UK's Paper-based Industries please visit: www.paper.org.uk.

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