



## Go Green Bags Fact Sheet: The UK

### Why should we cut back on plastic bags?

- The British people currently use around 10 billion thin plastic check-out bags every year.
- Whether it's inadvertent or deliberate, thin plastic bag litter creates many problems. Bags get caught in fences, bushes and trees. They end up blocking drains and trapping birds and when eaten they kill livestock.
- 47% of wind borne litter escaping from landfills is plastic - much of this is plastic bags.
- According to the Marine Conservation Society, its annual beach survey revealed that 47% of litter found on Britain's beaches in 2008 was plastic

### The last year has seen a marked change in attitudes towards single use plastic bags:

- It has moved firmly from the environmental lobby to the mainstream arena
- More people are starting to use recyclable bags in supermarkets
- Major retailers are announcing charging strategies and several have now stopped displaying free bags.
- The Welsh Assembly Govt. have announced they will introduce a levy from Spring 2011
- Well over 100 towns have gone, or are in the process of going, plastic bag free.

### But we are still well behind other countries:

- Ireland first introduced a plastic bag tax in 2002 and has seen usage fall by 90%
- In France last year the major supermarkets imposed a voluntary ban on free plastic bags and charge for re-usable bags. The French Government will impose a full ban by 2010
- Even China has imposed a ban from June 2008.

## So what should we be doing?

### Reduce

Think twice before you take a bag in the supermarket. A banana already has a protective skin –it doesn't need a plastic bag. When you get to the checkout, load big items like packs of juice directly into your trolley – they don't need a plastic bag.

### Re-use

Get into the habit of taking bags with you. Leave them by the front door. Always keep a few in the car. Have an emergency bag in your handbag. These can be plastic bags you have already or "bags for life" widely available. Or invest in some strong recyclable bags that will comfortably replace 3 to 4 standard supermarket bags.

### Recycle

The thin supermarket bag cannot be recycled. That's why we want to get rid of them. But do keep re-using the ones you have. Sometimes they do have a place-for messy waste etc. However, gradually, with consumer pressure we will move over completely to biodegradable plastic bags (still pretty expensive compared to normal bags) for these needs.

Go Green Bags have a natural life of over 3 years of heavy use before they become a bit tatty. They can then be recycled under Section 5 of the plastics recycling table and are usually turned into things like car dashboards.

Jute bags are biodegradable provided they do not have an internal (plastic) coating, which many do for added strength and durability. The liner needs to be removed before disposal.

Cotton and paper are biodegradable, but they have issues in their production –see "Our Bags".

**Doing away with single use polyethylene bags is easier than you think.**