



Clean Up Australia

Plastic Bags - World Report



2007 marks the plastic shopping bag's 30th anniversary.

Since their introduction **trillions** of plastic bags have been used and discarded globally. They don't break down easily, taking up to 1,000 years which means these 'convenient' carry bags are accumulating in the environment at a staggering rate.

These light-weight shopping bags, designed for single-use are easily carried by wind, escaping from rubbish bins and landfills. The issues resulting from plastic bag litter are common across continents and countries, waterways and oceans.

Plastic bags become a choking hazard for wildlife, especially marine animals and even when 'degraded' into smaller pieces are even more of a threat from mistaken ingestion right up the food chain. Some countries have taken action to reduce plastic bag litter because of specific consequences of accumulating bags such as flooding and malaria.

You will see from the information below that many different countries and cities around the world are now taking action against plastic bags, all with the motivation of reducing rubbish and protecting the natural environment.

Countries or cities taking action on plastic bags:

Africa

Botswana
Cameroon
Eritrea
Ghana
Kenya
Rwanda
Somalia
South Africa
Tanzania
Uganda
Zanzibar*

Americas

Brazil
Canada
United States of America

Asia Pacific

Australia
Bangladesh
Bhutan
China
Hong Kong*
India
Indonesia
Japan
Nepal
New Zealand
Pakistan
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Singapore
Taiwan

Europe

Channel Islands*
Denmark
Finland
France
Germany
Holland
Ireland
Italy
Scotland
Sweden
Switzerland
United Kingdom



Clean Up the World attracts more than 35 million volunteers from 120 countries each year who participate in a range of conservation activities such as rubbish clean ups, fix up projects, recycling projects, educational campaigns, waste, water and energy conservation and revegetation. Some countries focus specifically on plastic bags and throughout this report; these activities are described to highlight plastic bag action from local groups as well as government.

Africa

Botswana:

2006:

- ▶ A ban on the use of plastic bags took effect in 2006, forcing shoppers to either provide their own bags or pay for the new-style thicker recyclable bags.
- ▶ Wildlife, environment and tourism minister Mr Kitso Mokaila said in an interview that the new law aims to protect the environment. Plastic waste is the most visible and a major concern because it has environmental implications and there is need for us to manage the problem, he said.

Source: Botswana Press Agency

Cameroon:



Cameroon Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Agriculture and Rural Development Promoters (AGRUDEP)

A workshop on recycling plastic bag waste to shoe polish was held as part of initiatives to promote conservation awareness and practical environmental initiatives in collaboration with local authorities.

Source: Clean Up the World

Eritrea:

- ▶ Eritrea was once littered by a sea of flimsy shopping bags and since their introduction of a ban in 2005; plastic bag litter is fast becoming scarce. The ban impacts those who import, produce, distribute or sell plastic bags as fines are imposed.
- ▶ Individuals are not fined if they are caught with a plastic bag. They simply have to tell the authorities where they got the bag from. Kibrom Asmarom, an official in the environment department expressed satisfaction on people's respect of the law.
- ▶ Authorities had a raft of reasons for declaring war on the flimsy bags that not only block gutters and drains, choke farm animals and marine wildlife, pollute the soil, but also ruin dramatic natural vistas and can take 20 to 1,000 years to decompose.
- ▶ In the capital Asmara and other outlying regions, the bags have been replaced by the cotton and nylon and Eritreans have no choice but to adapt to instead.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com/news>

Ghana:



Ghana Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Glorious Children in Ghana

200 students volunteered to collect plastic bags and other wastes in a clean up event held as part of Clean Up the World weekend.

Source: Clean Up the World

Kenya:

2005:

- ▶ The Kenyan government, in conjunction with UNEP and the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, issued a report in early 2005 suggesting that Kenya should ban the common plastic shopping bag and place a levy on other plastic bags to combat the country's environmental problems stemming from the bags' popularity.
- ▶ The report proposes imposing a ban on bags less than 30 microns thick. Any monies raised would go towards the setting up of efficient and effective recycling schemes. The levy could also become a blue-print for similar schemes aimed at the rising tide of waste confronting Kenya and other countries across Africa.

Source: <http://www.plasticshoppingbagfree.org.nz>

- ▶ According to 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Kenyan Professor Wangari Mathaai, discarded bags fill up with rainwater and become perfect breeding grounds for malaria-bearing mosquitoes.

http://en.wikinews.org/wiki/Report_urges_Kenya_to_ban_plastic_bags



Kenya Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: The Reuse and Recycle Club

Clean Up Activities have taken place at the Giraffe Educational Centre in Nairobi. A Clean Up was held in the Parklands area of Nairobi with 4 bags of plastic and 1 bag of other waste being collected. The Club is also working with a local plastics company to collect plastic waste for recycling. They also hope to get supermarkets involved in the plastic recycling program.

Source: Clean Up the World



Kenya Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Christian Women Partners

Clean up activities were held on seven beaches on Mageta Island involving primary, secondary and university students as well as Forestry and Environment Ministries. A football match was held afterwards using a ball made of plastic bags to demonstrate fun re-use of waste.

Source: Clean Up the World

Rwanda:

2005:

- ▶ Rwanda has also banned the use of plastic bags for environmental reasons however some traders continue to use the banned plastic bags. Shops have been banned from giving plastic bags to their customers and police are reportedly stopping plastic-bag users in the street.
- ▶ Some Rwandans accuse government militias of using the law to steal goods being carried in plastic bags. One woman told the BBC's Geoffrey Mutagoma in the capital, Kigali, that local defence staff had thrown the glasses she was carrying in a plastic bag onto the ground.
- ▶ The environment minister Drocella Mugorewera admits that it will be impossible to completely end the use of plastic bags but she believes the measure to stop traders from importing and selling them will go a long way to protecting the environment.
"In Rwanda we have not yet reached the same level of development with other some countries which use plastic bags," she said.
"They have factories that recycle used bags. Even their citizens understand that it's wrong to throw rubbish anywhere. In our case we are still teaching our citizens."
- ▶ "We have a real problem with plastic and we are linking this with our efforts to protect our rivers and lakes," Ms Mugorewera told Reuters news agency. But some shop-owners feel the government is being too heavy-handed. "The government is being unfair to small business owners, some of us cannot afford expensive packing materials, our clients are running away," said one kiosk owner.
- ▶ Thousands of Rwandans have taken the day off work to pick up plastic bags as part of a government attempt to clean up the environment.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4619748.stm>

Somalia:

Self-declared Republic of Somaliland in northern Somalia

- ▶ Authorities in the self-declared republic of Somaliland banned the use of all types of plastic bags in 2005. The ban marked the end of a 120-day grace period that the government had given to the public to get rid of their stocks.
- ▶ The bags were mostly used to carry groceries and other goods. They were often discarded and litter most streets and landscapes across Somaliland. Many of them ended up being blown around and deposited on trees or shrubs, posing a danger to livestock because the animals that feed on the leaves in the shrubs often ingest the bags accidentally.
- ▶ People are being encouraged to use reusable, environmental-friendly baskets and containers, such as sacks made of straws, reeds and sisal, the kind of containers people traditionally used before the arrival of plastic bags.

Source: <http://www.mindfully.org/Plastic/Bans/Somalia-Bans-Plastic1mar05.htm>

South Africa:

2003:

- ▶ South Africa's plastic bag problem reached a climax in 2003 - plastic bags littered the streets to such an extent that they earned the nickname "national flower" because so many could be seen flapping from fences and caught in bushes.
- ▶ The government attempted to bring in a ban on thin bags, and in doing so very quickly, job losses and damage to the plastics industry threatened the success of this. Supermarkets were caught with huge stocks of plastic bags.
- ▶ In response, the plastics industry lobbied for a bag tax instead – and won. A tax on thicker bags is in place to discourage use.
- ▶ The agreement, which came into effect in 2003, stipulated that the thickness of plastic bags be 30 microns (as thick as a rubbish bag). The government wanted to ban all plastic bags thinner than 80 microns (average supermarket bag is 17 microns), but the proposal caused an outcry among trade unions and business due to manufacturing challenges. A compromise was reached where 24 microns is allowed for 5 years until having to comply with 30 microns.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3013419.stm>

- ▶ The legislation means shoppers now either have to take bags with them when they go shopping, or buy new, thick, stronger plastic bags that are easier and more profitable to recycle.
- ▶ Retailers handing out the banned 'thin' bags now face a fine of 100,000 rand (\$17,800) or a 10-year jail sentence.
- ▶ The plastic bags agreement and supporting regulations have dramatically decreased the environmental impact of this highly visible waste stream, with a 50% reduction (8 billion to 4 billion a year) in the use of plastic bags since the introduction of the regulations. Many reports from local and regular visitors say the landscape has changed dramatically, with less plastic bag litter particularly in poorer areas.
- ▶ The uptake by large stores has been highly successful. Pick'n'Pay large supermarket chain has been very active; promoting their version of the 'Green Bag' (sold 5.5 million to date). They also designed a 2 tier trolley frame, which you can collect your groceries in specially designed baskets (available for purchase) and take home with you – no need for a bag at all!

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/3013419.stm>
and <http://www.picknpay.co.za/enviro.html>

Tanzania:

2006:

- ▶ Tanzania is one of the more recent countries to place a ban on thin plastic bags.
- ▶ "The place had become an eyesore," said Tanzania's environmental director, Eriki Kamoga Mugurusi. The bags "fly very easily and their use was widespread - almost every town, every city. The litter was conspicuous."
- ▶ The government is hoping manufacturers will switch to sturdier plastics or other more environmentally friendly materials, such as paper and raffia grass. "The rule is always there but the government isn't serious about it," said Asif Akbarali, who owns a curio shop. "We are still using the thin ones."

<http://somalinet.com/news/world/Somalia/2220>



Tanzania Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Joint Environment and Development Management Action (JEMA) conducted workshops to train university students to become environmental ambassadors will take place throughout the year. Promotional campaigns will raise awareness about plastic bag use, the use of waste bins, recycling and natural resource management.

Source: Clean Up the World

Uganda:



Uganda Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Foundation For Women's Advancement Activities (FWAA)

Environmental Friendly Shopping Bag making workshop was held in Kasese Town with an estimated 400 volunteers taking part in September.

Source: Clean Up the World

Zanzibar:

Semi-Autonomous State of Tanzania

2006:

- ▶ It is estimated more than 200 tonnes of bags pass through Zanzibar's port every month destined for local and regional markets. Tourism in Zanzibar fuels the economy.
- ▶ "We have to put the environment above everything," Zanzibar's Director of Environment Ali Juma said. "Besides being an eyesore, plastic bags are very damaging to land and marine life and we are already threatened by the rapid pace of development."
- ▶ Zanzibar's ban on the import and production of plastic bags has come into effect. The government has suggested the use of raffia bags as an alternative.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6135886.stm>

Asia Pacific:

Australia:

- ▶ In 2002, the Environment Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC), made up of Australian Government, State and Territory Environment Ministers, agreed on a national approach to reduce lightweight plastic bag use.

They decided that a National Code of Practice for the management of light-weight plastic bags was needed, with participation rates of 90% for supermarket/retail chains and 25% for smaller retailers.

The EPHC set tough reduction and recycling targets in the Code for major supermarkets - the number of plastic bags issued by supermarkets had to fall by 25% by the end of 2004 and 50% by the end of 2005. A recycling rate of 15% (through in-store collection) was also set for the end of 2005.

- ▶ The targets for reduction in plastic bag use were *almost* achieved with a 41% reduction by supermarkets and an overall reduction of 34% - from 6 billion down to 3.92 billion bags per year. However the recycling rates remain poor at around 3%.
- ▶ The government is currently considering a ban or a levy. A recent Regulatory Impact Statement suggested action is taken from a State level with a consistent national approach.

Refer to Clean Up Australia's website www.cleanup.com.au for more information.

Bangladesh:

- ▶ In March 2002, Bangladesh slapped an outright ban on all polyethylene bags in the capital, Dhaka, after they were found to have been the main culprit during the 1988 and 1998 floods that submerged two-thirds of the country. The problem was that discarded bags were choking the drainage system. Plans are to extend the ban nationwide.
- ▶ The polythene ban is leading to a revival of the jute bag industry and other sustainable and biodegradable alternatives. It is widely acknowledged that jute may be one of the solutions to the polythene menace. Jute grows abundantly in Bangladesh and requires a lot less energy for processing than polythene.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com>

Bhutan:

- ▶ In 1999, the Ministry of Trade & Industry in conjunction with the Ministry of Health & Education, the Ministry of Communication, the National Environment Commission and the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce & Industry decided to ban the use and sale of plastic carry bags, doma wrappers and homemade ice cream pouches.
- ▶ This is to help conserve and protect the pristine environment and health of all beings by not using the banned plastic items. Shoppers and shopkeepers are requested to use cloth, paper, and other reusable and easily degradable bags.

Source: <http://www.reuses.com/nwpcarchive/postings/00062.html>

China:

- ▶ The term "white pollution" has been coined in China for the tumbleweed of polythene blowing on the streets where according to UK's The Guardian, 2 billion are used each day.
- ▶ To combat the growing problem of plastic bags in China, Guo Geng, a political adviser in Beijing, has proposed the introduction of a "bag tax" in a bid to help cut demand for plastic bags and raise more money to tackle pollution caused by the bags. Media reports claim that the Ministry of Finance is conducting a feasibility study for introducing such a tax.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com>

- ▶ "No Plastic Bag Day" was introduced in 2006 and was highly successful with shoppers and retailers saw a dramatic 40 percent reduction in the number of bags used. This campaign has expanded to more retailers and companies for 2007 which should see plastic bag waste continue to fall.
- ▶ Supermarket chain Wellcome said it will make "No Plastic Bag Day" a weekly event every Tuesday, up from a monthly event last year.
- ▶ A selection of supermarkets in Shanghai, China's largest city, charge shoppers for plastic bags in an attempt to reduce waste. Supermarkets in Shanghai give away more than one million bags per day - these either end up in landfills or blowing around the city as litter.

<http://hk-imal.singtao.com/news>



China Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: ShaoXing Bike Club

100 volunteers took part in a bike ride and collected roadside litter with a specific focus on plastic bags and plastic drink containers.

Source: *Clean Up the World*

Hong Kong:

- ▶ In 2001, it was estimated that 27 million plastic shopping bags were disposed of each day in Hong Kong. This is four times the use per person than in Australia.
- ▶ Hong Kong has implemented a campaign of "No plastic bag, please," and prohibits retailers over a specified size from providing free bags. The program has been designed to educate the public on alternatives to plastic bags and to encourage customers to make environmentally friendly decisions and purchases. Along with the public campaigns, there is an environmental tax in place for products for which there is an environmentally-friendly alternative readily available.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com/facts.php?id=9>

India:

- ▶ In India, cows are ingesting plastic bags as they forage for food on the street. They then end up choking or starving to death.
- ▶ A law introduced recently prohibits plastic bags thinner than 20 microns in the cities of Bombay and Delhi, along with the entire states of Maharashtra and Kerala. The restriction is meant to discourage production and use due to the thicker bags being more expensive and success has been marginal.
- ▶ The ban had been prompted by the indiscriminate use of plastic bags, which blocked sewage and drainage systems during record monsoon rains. Flooding and landslides killed more than 1,000 people in the state.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/india/>

India Continued...

- ▶ The northern Indian state of Himachal Pradesh has also introduced a new law which states that anyone found even using a polythene bag could face prison or a fine. The new law bans the production, storage, use, sale and distribution of polythene bags. The law is based on legislation passed by the national parliament, but Himachal Pradesh is the first state to have implemented it.
- ▶ The government of the western Indian state of Maharashtra banned the manufacture, sale and use of all plastic bags, saying they choked drainage systems during recent monsoon rains.

<http://www.reusablebags.com/facts.php?id=9>

Indonesia:



Indonesia Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Indonesia Australia Action Committee (IACT)
Approximately 200 volunteers took part in a clean up event where rubbish was collected and separated for recycling. One of the main aims of the activity is to educate the people to understand how to reduce plastic bag use and create a cleaner, healthier environment.

Source: Clean Up the World



Indonesia Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Sahabat Alam
An anti plastic bag campaign was held with eco friendly shopping bags being distributed in a local supermarket.

Source: Clean Up the World

Japan:

- ▶ The Japan Franchise Association announced in 2006 that 12 major operators of convenience stores have set up five-year plans to reduce the consumption of plastic bags. They will eventually reduce the total consumption in each store by 35 percent by 2010, as compared with 2000 levels.
- ▶ Their methods for reducing plastic bag use include asking customers buying fewer items to have store stickers placed on them instead of having them packed in plastic bags (the stickers indicate that the item has been paid for); and promoting simpler packaging by in-store announcements and/or posters.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com/news.php>

Nepal:

- Nepal's campaign started in 1999 with the government's decision to ban all kinds of plastic bags and bottles in the Khumbu region, near Mount Everest, the world's highest mountain.
- At a Kathmandu environmental conference in January 2000, Nepal's junior minister for population and environment, Bhakta Bahadur Balayar, declared "MOPE (acronym for the ministry) is all set to ban polythene bags, especially the black ones (made from recycled polythene)," the minister said. "We are drafting a bill to be introduced in the next parliamentary session."
- Nepal town Tupche converted their village into a plastic free zone banning use and distribution of any plastic materials threatening fines from ten rupees to twenty five rupees for people trying to sell or bring plastics in to use.

Nepal Continued...

- Towns like Hetauda, south of Kathmandu, have been discouraging bag use since Jan 2000 in preparation for banning. In 2000, Hetauda Municipality officials claim there has been a notable improvement in the environment since the policy was announced last year.

Source: <http://www.mindfully.org/Plastic/Bans/Bags-Banned-Kathmandu20jan00.htm>



Nepal Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: Clean Up Banepa - clean ups and educational talks will be held in schools of Banepa during the week beginning 24 September. Reusable bags will be distributed to encourage residents to reduce plastic bag use.

Source: *Clean Up the World*

New Zealand:

- ▶ New Zealanders use approximately 800 million plastic bags each year. There are several organisations developing positive alternatives to plastic bags and raising awareness within local communities. Christchurch City Council is collecting plastic shopping bags from the kerbside as part of their recycling collection.

Source: <http://www.zerowaste.co.nz>

- ▶ Several of New Zealand's leading retailers are taking the initiative and introducing reusable shopping bags for sale. Foodstuffs New Zealand, owner of Pak'N Save and New World, is stocking shelves with cotton reusable bags. Initial results have been positive.
- ▶ Government sponsored programs are promoting environmental awareness, urging consumers to reduce rubbish and consider eco-friendly alternatives to the plastic bag. Grassroots efforts are also popping up around the country to help in the fight to eliminate plastic bags.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com>

Pakistan:



Pakistan Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: In the lead up to CUW Weekend information and promotional materials were distributed to government departments, NGOs, schools and the local community. On September 15-17 over 700 volunteers from a range of groups took part in a clean up at sites around Lahore. Environmental lectures were also held at 9 schools with a special focus on minimising plastic bag use.

Source: *Clean Up the World*

Papua New Guinea:

- ▶ Papua New Guinea began discussing action on plastic bags in 2002. Plastic bags were finding their way into the town and city drainage systems, causing blockage and costly maintenance fees.
- ▶ The Coastal Clean-up Association has conducted clean ups in selected areas around urban centres annually and have raise public awareness on the impact of pollution on the environment and community.
- ▶ The country's rapid grasp of the western lifestyles in recent years has seen the people throw away their traditional items and knowledge in exchange for more convenient and sophisticated modern options. Bilums and baskets were some of the first casualties which shoppers and market-goers swapped for plastic bags.

Source: <http://www.postcourier.com.pg/20021115/weekend01.htm>

- ▶ Reports now suggest that there has not been a lot of change in plastic bag use, rubbish behaviour or the amount of plastic bag litter in the environment.

Samoa:



Samoa Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: A local school conducts a clean up each month along the beachfront. They document the number of plastic bags and other plastic debris found within 5m of the water's edge. This activity ties in with the 2006 Pacific Year of the Sea Turtle.

Source: Clean Up the World

Singapore:

- ▶ The National Environment Agency (NEA), the Singapore Retailers Association (SRA) and the Singapore Environment Council (SEC) have partnered for this campaign to help the retail sector and shoppers reduce waste and go green.
- ▶ In addition to the plastic bag campaign, Carrefour, Cold Storage, NTUC FairPrice, and Shop N Save have also kicked off a pilot recycling programme.

Source: <http://app.nea.gov.sg/cms/htdocs/article.asp?pid=2068>

Taiwan:

- ▶ Prior to 2001, some 16 million plastic bags were being given away daily in Taiwan.
- ▶ In October 2001, Taiwan introduced a ban on distribution of free single-use plastic bags by government agencies, schools and the military. The ban was expanded to include supermarkets, fast food outlets and department stores, and will eventually apply to street vendors and food dealers. Disposable cutlery and dishes are also banned.
- ▶ The head of Taiwan's EPA felt so strongly about the issue that he made an ultimatum that he would quit if it weren't implemented. Even though the plastic bag industry lobbied hard and tried to create a grass roots movement to stop the ban, it was drowned out by the majority and ultimately implemented.

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Europe

Channel Islands: UK

- ▶ In one day of action in 2006, shops around the Channel Islands did not give out disposable bags at the till and promoted the use of reusable ones. The day was deemed a success and organiser's hope that eventually islanders will give up single-use plastic bags altogether. Jersey's landfills currently process 12 million plastic bags every year.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com>

Denmark:

- ▶ Denmark introduced a tax on plastic bags in 1994; however this tax is paid by the retailers. As a result, retailers strongly promote the use of alternatives to shoppers. This has resulted in a 66% drop in plastic bag use, though has levelled out.

Source: <http://www.cleannorth.org/>

Finland:

- ▶ In Finland, supermarkets pay a levy on the amount of plastic bags used, with the proceeds funding recycling.

Source: <http://www.cleannorth.org/>

France:

- ▶ The French island of Corsica was the first to ban plastic bags in 1999. After a long campaign involving environmentalists and the tourist industry, Corsica replaced all plastic bags with biodegradable bags.
- ▶ French MP's have recently adopted a radical measure which prohibits the marketing of non-biodegradable bags from 2010. The French government will be providing money to assist their plastics industry to reorientate itself to the production of these new biodegradable bags.
- ▶ Each year around 200 plastic bags are used by each person in France. Launched in 2003, the policy of reducing the use of plastic bags allowed the French public to get used to the idea, but the numbers remain high, with 18 billion bags used in 2004.
- ▶ The city of Paris has decided to ban non-biodegradable plastic bags in large stores as of 2007. Experts say these single use plastic bags account for 8,000 tons of waste generated in Paris each year, at a cost of more than \$2 million.

Source: Serge Orru, World Wildlife Fund France and www.voanews.com/english/

Germany:

- ▶ Most German supermarkets charge between 5 and 10 cents per single-use bag, depending on the type of bag. Stores also offer cloth bags or woven plastic bags encouraging shoppers to re-use them.

Source: <http://www.cleannorth.org/>

Holland:

- ▶ The Dutch are keen on recycling their carrier bags. They incinerate the bags in accordance with strict environmental rules and use the resulting energy to heat hospitals.

Source: <http://www.cleannorth.org/>

Ireland:

- ▶ Republic of Ireland was consuming 1.2 billion plastic shopping bags per year before introducing the PlasTax – a charge to customers of 15 cents introduced in 2002. The first year, saw a dramatic reduction in use by over 90% - just under 90 million bags were bought by the public and this fell to less than 85 million in 2003. And while the sales of some other forms of plastic bag did increase, the net overall reduction was still 930 million plastic bags, with an apparently insignificant increase in paper bag use as a substitute. Anecdotal evidence from Ireland overwhelmingly suggests that consumers switched to reusable bags – exactly the kind of change in behaviour that the levy was aiming to stimulate.
- ▶ Revenue raised from this tax (9.6 million in the first year) is put in to a ‘green fund’ which goes towards environmental projects.
- ▶ Also, litter has been dramatically reduced and approximately 18 million litres of oil have been saved due to reduced production of plastic bags.
- ▶ Some plastic bag companies went out of business, while others have benefited by seizing the opportunity to make reusable shopping bags.
- ▶ This levy has been viewed as a major success by the government and environmental groups. It has also been enthusiastically embraced by Irish consumers, thanks to an intensive environmental awareness campaign that was launched in conjunction with the levy.
- ▶ Exemptions from the tax include heavier weight reusable plastic bags; bags used for meat, fish, or poultry; bags for unpackaged produce, ice, or other foods without packaging.
- ▶ The Irish government in 2006 acknowledged that the use of plastic bags has since crept back up. Reaching a low of 85 million in 2003, the use of plastic bags has since increased to 100 million in 2004 and a least 113 million in 2005 (a rise of over a third) according to the Department of Environment. If use rose steadily by 15% each year, it would take just 15 years for use to creep back to 1.2 billion plastic bags a year.
- ▶ Environment groups are pushing for an increase in the levy. Oisín Coghlan from Friends of the Irish Environment commented "The best way to re-focus the minds of retailers and consumers on the importance of the tax is to increase it substantially. This is one of the few taxes you are not supposed to pay; you are supposed to avoid it. The tax was designed to change behaviour not raise revenue yet the amount of money flowing to government from the levy has now passed 50 million Euro. There's a danger they will get used to it. Government needs to raise the tax enough to put people off paying it again."
- ▶ As well as rising sales of plastic bags the Minister of the Environment has admitted that an increasing number of bags are being given away by retailers in breach of the regulations. In a press statement, Dick Roche said "From representations I have received there would appear to be some anecdotal evidence of slippage in application of the levy. I have asked my Department to write to local authorities asking them to carry out inspections of retail outlets with a view to improving current practices in relation to the implementation of the Plastic Bag Levy Regulations".
- ▶ In 2007, the Irish Government announced they were increasing the levy from 15cents to 22cents
- ▶ The Minister for Environment has also looked into a tax on chewing gum, ATM balance slips and fast food containers however he has abandoned immediate plans due to industry pressure.

Source: www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net

Italy:

- ▶ In 1989, Italy introduced a tax on plastic bags. Abandoned plastic bags were an eyesore on Italian beaches and on the sea, and posed a danger to dolphins that could die from ingestion of plastic bags. The new tax sought to have the price of bags better reflect the cost that they imposed onto society and on the environment.
- ▶ By levying a tax of 100 lira (about 8.5 cents) per plastic bag on importers or producers, the Italian government created a new signal to the market economy — the cost of plastic bags was now greater compared to alternatives. The tax was about five times as great as the manufacturing cost per bag. From 1989 to 1992, the government raised over 250 billion lira (around \$212 million) through this tax.

Source: <http://www.iisd.org/susprod/displaydetails.asp?id=148>

Scotland:

- ▶ Scotland has debated the plastic bag issue in parliament with a bill put forward to introduce a plastic bag levy much the same as Ireland. Despite support among Ministers, the bill was withdrawn recently. The plastics manufacturers opposed the bill, saying it would harm the economy and cost jobs.
- ▶ Now it is recommended a retailer's voluntary code be adhered to, similar to the Australian code.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com>

Sweden:

- ▶ Sweden charges as tax on plastic bags along the same lines as Germany and Denmark. In 1991, Sweden also introduced a tax on the sale of toxic batteries, the revenue of which funds collection and disposal.
- ▶ The Swedish Furniture Group, IKEA have been instrumental in reducing plastic bag use in their stores throughout the world. A tax on bags at British Stores saw plastic bag use drop by 95%.

Source: <http://www.cleannorth.org/>

Switzerland:

- ▶ Switzerland requires supermarkets to charge \$.15 to \$.20 per paper bag. The majority of shoppers bring their own reusable bags.

Source: <http://www.cleannorth.org/>

United Kingdom:

- ▶ The United Kingdom was considering a 'Plastax' similar to Ireland. The Minister of the Environment is in favour of it, but the British Plastics Federation, the "Carrier Bag Consortium," and other plastics industry groups are strongly opposing the proposed tax.
- ▶ The government fully support reusable carrier bags and some retailers in the United Kingdom have embraced this such as the "Bag for life" and "penny back" schemes introduced by the large supermarket chains.
- ▶ Some large retailers are rewarding customers who bring their own bags or who reuse or recycle existing bags. This has been adopted by Tesco, who call it the 'Green Bag Scheme'.

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com>

Americas

Brazil:



Brazil Clean Up the World 2006 Activity: 190 volunteers including the Department of Environment from the Itanhaém Municipality and the Forest Institute/SMA cleaned up an area of 1.9km including an island in Itanhaém, São Paulo. These locations included Sonho Beach, Pescadores Beach, Saudade Beach, the coast of Prainha, Cabras Island and Sonho Beach. A total of 480kgs of waste was collected which was made up of 3,627 items of waste. Plastic bags containing stagnant water were found in large quantities encouraging the proliferation of dengue fever.

Source: Clean Up the World

Canada:

- ▶ Companies in Canada are investing millions of dollars into "bag to bag" recycling programs, which use material from recycled plastic bags to create new plastic bags, as well as programs that buy back recycled bags and turn them into plastic decking.
- ▶ Plastic Bags are included in Kerbside collections.
- ▶ Some municipal areas have suggested a tax on plastic bags, others believing the responsibility does not lie with them. Toronto city councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker recently proposed looking at a tax on plastic bags in an effort to greatly reduce the number of bags finding their way to landfill or littering the streets.
- ▶ Discussions on the issue are becoming more and more frequent.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plastic_shopping_bag

United States of America:

- ▶ This is a relatively new area of concern in the United States; however there is a growing interest in this issue. The federal system in the US means that cities, states and local townships can initiate their own actions aimed at reducing plastic bags use.
- ▶ There has been no broad government action against the plastic bag litter problem, although some local governments have enacted regulations, and many stores allow customers to return the bags for recycling.
- ▶ San Francisco is thinking about imposing a 17 cent surcharge on plastic and paper grocery bags and if it goes ahead, they will be the first US city to do so.
- ▶ California Governor Schwarzenegger signed Assembly Bill 2449 (sponsored by Levine) on September 30, 2006 to implement a state-wide plastic bag recycling program.

From the Governor's Signing Message:

"While this bill may not go as far as some local environmental groups and cities may have hoped, this program will make progress to reduce plastics in our environment. This measure requires every retail establishment that provides its customers plastic bags to have an in store plastic bag recycling program, a public awareness program promoting bag recycling, post recycling requirements, record keeping and penalties."

- ▶ Empty bags carried on the wind are popularly known as "Urban Tumbleweed"

Source: <http://www.reusablebags.com/news.php>