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## October 2015: Single Use Plastic Carrier Bags – FAQ on the use of Compostable Bags

### General Introduction

From 5 October 2015, all retailers employing more than 250 full time equivalent employees in England must charge at least 5p for a lightweight plastic carrier bag (70 microns or less). Retailers will have to account for VAT at 20% and excluding any additional reasonable new costs will be expected to donate any profits to good causes. Retailers have to report sales numbers and final destination for the profits to the Government on an annual basis.

### Introduction to Compostable Carrier Bags

Cutting food waste is increasingly a priority of campaign groups and part of the media. The UN World Food Day, October 16<sup>th</sup>, highlights foodwaste as a critical challenge to tackle. Indeed there is particular concern about the amount of food waste going to landfill, where it rots to release the greenhouse gas methane. These high levels of uncollected food waste are caused by a lack of convenient ways to collect the waste and, if collected, a high level of plastic contamination. The latter is often caused by households using conventional plastics for food collection. Compostable carrier bags provide a cost-effective, single UK solution to both these problems, as the Renewable Energy Association (REA) has also underlined.

Compostable carrier bags in appearance and usability are broadly similar to conventional plastic bags but are [organically] recyclable here in the UK. They are typically made in Europe using European resins containing renewable resources. The unique biodegradability function of these bags means that they are perfect for reuse to collect household food waste prior to recycling either in garden compost bins or at the increasing number of industrial organic recycling facilities across England and the UK.

Given much of the plastic film from conventional carriers cannot be recycled in the current UK waste system, compostable plastics solve multiple problems. A number of the other benefits are outlined below:

- For retailers compostable carrier bags are a locally recyclable packaging item where food waste collection programmes are in place or planned and are designed to encourage more food waste recycling
- For consumers just 2 compostable carrier bags a week are the perfect tool to collect their 3-4 kg of food waste prior to organic recycling
- For local authorities compostable carrier bags not only promote the collection of food waste but enhance their overall recycling performance
- For everybody, calculated on Defra's Impact Assessment, if supermarkets switched to compostable bags after 5 October then this would be the equivalent in CO2 reductions of taking at least 170,000 medium cars\* off the road in England each year.

\*based on a medium sized car emitting 430 gCO2 per mile and travelling 9,000 miles / year, calculated using recognized Life Cycle Inventory data



## Questions and Answers

### **Can I sell compostable carrier bags for 5p in England?**

Yes, as long as you charge at least 5p, you can sell compostable carrier bags.

### **Do compostable carrier bags comply with other relevant legislation such as the Packaging Requirements (Essential Requirements), UK organic recycling rules, EU Food Contact Regulations?**

Certification to the European Standard EN13432:2000 demonstrates compliance with the Essential Requirements, the same certification is also necessary for acceptance at UK organic recycling facilities. It is not possible to make a general statement regarding EU Food Contact compliance which should be provided by the supplier.

### **Is there a difference between compostable and home compostable carrier bags?**

Yes, home compostable bags are made from materials specially designed to biodegrade at the lower temperatures and different conditions found in home compost bins compared to industrial facilities. Most people do not know the difference and presume compostable to mean home compostable. BBIA recommends that carrier bags are also approved for home composting e.g. through Vincotte's OK Compost Home scheme and the Dincerto DIN-Geprüft Home Compostable. This labelling ensures that the bags are compostable in industrial facilities as well as in home composting.

### **Why should I choose home compostable carrier bags instead of standard polyethylene bags?**

Whilst having similar mechanical properties as standard plastic bags, home compostable bags have the additional benefit of being suitable for the collection of food waste prior to organic recycling (home / industrial composting, anaerobic digestion) here in the UK.

### **How can home compostable carrier bags be realised as a good cause?**

Defra has confirmed to BBIA that when compostable carrier bags are sold to support local authority food waste collections the cost of the bag is considered a good cause. Bags will need to be marketed (at least through on bag printing) that they should be reused for food waste collection and the support of the local authority where the bags are sold should also be gained. BBIA and its members can help close the loop between retail, consumer, local authority and organic recycler.

An example print is given below. The codes accompanying the logos shown for industrial and home are for illustrative purposes only. Valid codes, which are specific to each product, must be displayed.

### **Where can I get more information?**

Please contact David Newman, [dn@bbia.org.uk](mailto:dn@bbia.org.uk) for more information



## Example design for carrier bags

To scale design including cutter guide is available on request

