

BBC Learning English

6 Minute English

Plastic Carrier Bags



NB: This is not a word for word transcript

Rob: Hello, I'm Rob...

Cath: And I'm Cath.

Rob: And this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. Today we're talking about plastic carrier bags.

Cath: Yes, they're very useful for carrying our shopping home in from the supermarket but are a bit of a problem.

Rob: Not surprisingly millions are used every day all around the world. And today we'll be telling you about a fight to cut the number being used and thrown away. Now, Cath, do you use lots of carrier bags?

Cath: Well I try not to. I think it's really really important not to but I do seem to end up with quite a few. Either I stuff them in a drawer and try and forget about them or I recycle them.

Rob: That's good because recycling the plastic carrier bags is one way to reduce waste but I'll tell you more about plans to cut their use soon. But first Cath, we always like to start the programme with a question. So are you ready to answer this one?

Cath: Alright then!

Rob: Now, approximately how many plastic carrier bags are used worldwide every year? Is it:

- a) 500 million
- b) 500 billion
- c) 500 trillion

Cath: I don't even know what 500 trillion means. I'm going to go for – I can't believe it's billions – it must be 500 million.

Rob: OK, well, we'll see if you're right at the end of the programme. Now let's get back to the story about a fight to reduce the use of carrier bags.

Cath: Yes, and of course, this is not a real fight! This is a **campaign**. And it sounds tricky because plastic bags are so useful.

Rob: Yes. Plastic actually is a very useful **resource**. There are so many things we use every day that are made from this chemically produced material – but the carrier bag is probably the product that gets the most **criticism**.

Cath: Criticism – that's when something or someone gets unfavourable comments. And the plastic carrier bag gets blamed for lots of environmental problems.

Rob: Yes. For example, many of them end up in our seas and in our countryside and get swallowed by animals and fish. The problem is they're not **biodegradable**.

Cath: Yes, they don't decompose naturally very quickly. It can take up to 1000 years.

Rob: So that's why the government in Wales is trying to fight the problem. Let's hear from the BBC's Collette Hume to hear what's being done and how widespread the problem is...

Collette Hume, BBC

The carrier bag. Shoppers in Wales will have to pay five pence for every one they use, making Wales the first part of the UK to charge for them. UK shoppers use around 13,000 carrier bags in their lifetime. In Wales that amounts to around 480 million bags every year or 150 bags for every person.

- Cath:** Incredible! She says shoppers in the UK use around 13,000 carrier bags in their lifetime.
- Rob:** So to try and cut that number, the Welsh government is introducing a **compulsory** tax of five pence for every bag that someone uses.
- Cath:** Compulsory – so you have to pay it, there's no choice. So if someone uses 20 bags in a week then that's an extra pound you will spend just on plastic bags!
- Rob:** Well this is the idea of the tax – or **financial levy** – people might think twice about using a bag.
- Cath:** And of course, they might start re-using the old bags or recycling. This will cut down on the number of bags being dumped and left to decompose in **landfill sites** – that's another name for a rubbish dump.
- Rob:** This new tax is one way **to wean** people off the single-use carrier bag. But the government is also providing tougher, stronger bags that last for a long time and can be used again and again.
- Cath:** Yes, I've got something like that from my supermarket. But the problem is I sometimes forget to take it with me every time I go shopping!
- Rob:** That is annoying! But for the Welsh government, this isn't just an issue about carrier bags but more about getting people to think about the wider environment. Let's hear more about the government's thinking from the Welsh environment minister, John Griffiths. Listen out for the word he uses to describe what he wants people to change...

John Griffiths , Welsh Environment Minister

We want people to think more about environmental issues and change the way they behave so that they reuse their bags rather than having lots and lots of carrier bags spoiling their environment. But as a result of the change they think more about environmental issues generally and change their behaviour so that we have a cleaner, tidier Wales.

Rob: So he wants people to think more about environmental issues and to change how they behave – their **behaviour**.

Cath: So he wants to change their habits and that could lead to a cleaner and tidier Wales – a more **environmentally friendly** Wales.

Rob: That means being more caring about the natural world around them.

Cath: It's a good **ethos** and it will be good to see if these new plans work. Of course there are many other parts of the World where a plastic bag tax has already been introduced with good results.

Rob: But still billions – or is it trillions?! – of new carrier bags get used every year. And that brings me back to today's question. Now, Cath, I asked you approximately how many plastic carrier bags are used worldwide every year?

a) 500 million

b) 500 billion

c) 500 trillion

Cath: And I said 500 million but I'm guessing that's far too few.

Rob: Far too few. Absolutely wrong! The actual answer is 500 billion. OK, well we're almost at the end of the programme, so Cath could you please remind us of some of the vocabulary we've heard in today's programme?

Cath: We had:

campaign

resource

criticism

biodegradable

compulsory

financial levy

landfill sites

to wean

behaviour

environmentally friendly

ethos

Rob: Thanks Cath. We hope you've enjoyed today's programme. OK well it's time to go now but we'll see you next time!

Both: Bye!

Vocabulary and definitions

campaign	a set of activities planned to achieve something, such as social or political change
resource	here, a valuable and useful product
criticism	the expression of disapproval of someone or something
biodegradable	something that decomposes or breaks down naturally without any special treatment
compulsory	something that must be done
financial levy	a sum of money that you pay in tax
landfill sites	a place where a large amounts of waste materials are disposed of
to wean	to gradually make people stop doing something or using something
behaviour	the way people or things act, function or change
environmentally friendly	a caring effect on natural world, such as plants, animals and the atmosphere
ethos	set of ideas and attitudes

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