



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **POLYTHENE BAGS – NOT NECESSARILY THE ENVIRONMENTAL BAD GUY**

The Dept for the Environment has just published a comprehensive report on the impact of various types of shopping bag on the environment, taking into account the entire lifecycle of the bags from producing the raw material, processing, transport and disposal. The findings suggest that a lot of what you thought you knew is wrong – the conventional disposable carrier bag isn't necessarily the worst option for the environment.

The key to being environmentally sound is to re-use the bag as many times as possible. A quite high proportion of single use carriers are re-used as rubbish disposal bags, saving the production of significant amounts of bin liners, and relatively little material is used in their manufacture..

The following table shows the number of times each type of bag needs to be re-used to be more environmentally friendly than the humble polythene bag:

Paper bag	4 times
LDPE "Bag for life"	5 times
Non-woven PP bag – fabric-look "Bag for Life"	14 times
Cotton bag	173 times

Our conclusions from the Report would be that:

Paper bags are a disaster – nobody is going to re-use one 4 times and they are not suitable for use as rubbish bags. Single use polythene is actually a better option.

Cotton bags are highly dubious – we suspect that few cotton bags survive 173 outings to the shops with their gussets intact and still looking like something to put food in. Cotton is a very ecologically unsound crop and not particularly durable. Other options are better.

The best answer seems to be the various types of re-usable polythene or polyethalene bags, where just a few repeat uses put you into the black in terms of environmental impact. An ordinary bag for life, used 5 times, or a fabric look one used 14 times, seem the best routes to a clear conscience.

The full report can be found at: [http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/Carrier\\_Bags\\_final\\_18-02-11.pdf](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/static/documents/Research/Carrier_Bags_final_18-02-11.pdf)

But whatever you do, don't print it out – it runs to 120 pages and no doubt it is equivalent to a goodly number of polythene bags in the green stakes.

**Notes for editors:**

The Rural Shops Alliance (RSA) is the national voice for about 7,500 rural retailers. We campaign on their behalf and also help these shops to become more competitive with practical advice and support, to the benefit of thousands of rural communities. Many 'blue chip' suppliers and county councils sponsor and partner the work of the RSA. Our direct contact with rural shops and with these organisations means that we keep in close touch with emerging issues and concerns in our fast changing business sector.

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