

Methodological summary on carrier bags data

2017/18 is the second full year of reporting for the data on single-use carrier bags in England. An initial report was published in July 2016 which covered only a 6 month period from October 2015 to 6 April 2016. In July 2017 the first full year of data for April 2016 to April 2017 was published.

For the period April 2017 to April 2018, a total of 249 retailers reported data to Defra on single use carrier bags. They are required to report some of the information, but reporting of other additional information is voluntary. Not all retailers have provided the additional voluntary information; some have noted that they do not collect this.

Data collection and reporting

Large retailers are expected to submit data on a central reporting website before 31 May of each financial year. For example, for the period 7 April 2017 to 6 April 2018 a retailer must record details on the website by 31 May 2018. Retailers can be fined if they don't submit records on time.

Improvements were made to the central reporting website for 2017 to 2018 data which included clearer guidance for retailers regarding their reporting responsibilities and automatic calculations for some fields to assist in data entry.

In addition retailers were asked to outline their methods of data collection and any quality assurance carried out.

The majority of retailers recorded that their data came from information collected from their till transactions or electronic points of sale and were verified through their own internal management systems.

Data quality

We have undertaken checks and testing on the central reporting website used by retailers and carried out basic quality assurance of the data received. These have included checking for consistency, outliers and data errors in relations to charge per bag, gross proceeds, number of bags, amount of VAT recorded, costs incurred and net proceeds. We have also worked with some retailers to resolve data issues and errors to ensure this is robust as possible. We will continue to keep the guidance and reporting website under review and consider any further feedback received from retailers.

Some specific notes on the data include the following:

- The minimum price per bag is 5p and some retailers charge more than 5p per bag and in some cases may use different rates where they sell different types of bags.

- Some retailers have chosen to donate the full gross proceeds to good causes – the amount donated to charity will therefore be larger than the net proceeds. Some retailers have also made additional donations.
- The standard VAT rate is 20 per cent but retailers have the option to enter their own figures; in some cases the retailer has a different rate.

For the 2017 to 2018 reporting year:

- 23 retailers provided data for the first time. These retailers account for 0.24% of the total number of single use plastic bags reported for 2017 to 2018
- A small number of retailers who submitted data for 2016 to 2017 did not report data for 2017 to 2018. In 2016 to 2017, these retailers accounted for 0.76% of the total carrier bags.
- 5 of the missing retailers have stopped issuing single use plastic carrier bags, and are therefore are no longer obligated to report data. These five retailers together sold 10.8 million bags in 2016 to 2017 (0.51% of the total bags for that reporting period.)
- 5 of the missing retailers have stopped operating in the last 12 months, so although they may have issued some carrier bags in this reporting period, it was not possible to obtain their data. These retailers together sold 2.7 million bags in 2016 to 2017 (0.13% of total bags).
- The remaining missing retailers did not report data and did not inform Defra that they have stopped issuing single use carrier bags. These retailers together sold 2.5 million bags in 2016 to 2017 – just 0.12% of the total number of bags reported for 2016 to 2017.

Data coverage

The data coverage is for large retail businesses with 250 or more employees in England. Retailers who fall within the scope of the carrier bag charge are [required to register and report their single-use carrier bag data](#).

They are not required to report on carrier bag use if:

- they do not distribute bags within the definition of single-use plastic carrier bags
- they only distribute paper bags
- they only sell bags for life, that is, bags which are thicker than 70 microns (these are exempt from the charge)
- they are small and medium-sized businesses with less than 250 full-time equivalent employees (as they are not required to charge for bags)

A total of 249 retailers reported single-use carrier bags data for 2017 to 2018.

Direct comparison of data

A direct comparison between the total number of bags reported in 2017 to 2018 and 2016 to 2018 is not appropriate due to the differences in retailers submitted, as detailed above.

It is more appropriate to compare the 226 retailers who reported data for both of these period, and to compare data reported by the 7 main retailers.

Also note that data on donations is voluntary information. For 2016 to 2017 this was provided by 167 (64%) retailers and for 2017 to 2018 this was provided by 155 (62%) the retailers. The headline figures on donations are therefore not directly comparable.

Additionally, the sale of single use carrier bags may vary over the course of a year due to various reasons including seasonality of sales, therefore, a direct comparison of the full years of data for 2016 to 2017 and 2017 to 2018 to the initial six month data for 2015 to 2016 is **not** appropriate.

Access to data

The full dataset detailing the information provided by each retailer can be accessed and downloaded from data.gov.uk.

Feedback

We are always interested in feedback from users on any aspect of the carrier bags report and data in general. In particular we would welcome hearing about what users do with the results and data. Comments may be sent to the Carrier bags team using the following contact details:

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