

Methodological summary on carrier bags data

2018/19 is the third 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. In July 2018 the second full year of data for April 2017 to April 2018 was published.

For the period April 2018 to April 2019, a total of 221 retailers reported data to Defra on single use carrier bags. They are required to report some of the information (number of single use carrier bags sold under the charge, gross proceeds, any costs incurred and the use of the net proceeds), but reporting other, additional information is voluntary (amounts donated and the type of good causes in receipt of any donations plus information on the number of paper bags or bags for life issued by retailers). 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. Retailers can be fined if they don't submit records on time.

Improvements were made to the central reporting website for 2018 to 2019 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. For those retailers that provided this information, the majority 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.

We asked retailers to specify whether they were a large retailer and so mandated to provide information on their single use carrier bag sales or a smaller retailer providing information on a voluntary basis. During quality assurance of the data, it became clear that there was a misunderstanding in the completion of the mandatory/voluntary reporting field. For around 20 retailers their mandatory/voluntary categorisation has been amended based on the number of employees they reported so any with employee numbers at or above 250 have been regarded as reporting on a mandatory basis.

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 as 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, though 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% but retailers have the option to enter their own figures; in some cases the retailer has a different rate.

For the 2018 to 2019 reporting year:

- 16 retailers provided data for the first time. These retailers account for 0.3% of the total number of single use bags reported for 2018 to 2019.
- 44 retailers who submitted data for 2017 to 2018 did not report data for 2018 to 2019. In 2017 to 2018 these retailers accounted for less than 3% of the total number of single use bags.
- 9 of the missing retailers notified us that they have stopped issuing single use plastic carrier bags, and are therefore are no longer obligated to report data. These 9 retailers together sold 29 million bags in 2017 to 2018 (1.5% of the total bags for that reporting period)
- 4 of the missing retailers notified us that they 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. One of these retailers was purchased by another company and they have reported under a new name (reporting only covers part of the year). These 4 retailers together sold 13.5 million bags in 2017/18 (0.8% of total bags)
- 1 of the missing retailers informed us that they are not obligated to complete a return as they have fewer than 250 employees (and are now not reporting).
- The remaining 30 missing retailers who did not report, did not notify us of the reason for not supplying the information. These retailers together sold 6.4 million bags in 2017 to 2018 (0.4% of total bags).

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 221 retailers reported single use carrier bags data for 2018 to 2019. A small number (6) of retailers have reported data on a voluntary basis. These retailers account for less than 1% of all reported bags. There appears to have been some misunderstanding in the completion of the mandatory/voluntary reporting field, so for a number of retailers (22) their mandatory/voluntary reporting field has been amended based on the number of employees they reported.

It is possible that for some of the retailers, including those with 250 or more employees and reporting on a mandatory basis, that the retail element may be a small part of the overall business so the number of single carrier bags sold may be relatively low in comparison to others where the retail element is a much more significant part of the business.

Direct comparison of data

A direct comparison between the total number of bags reported in 2018 to 2019 and 2017 to 2018 is not appropriate due to the differences in retailers submitted, as detailed above.

It is more appropriate to compare the 205 retailers who reported data for both of these periods, and to compare data reported by the main retailers.

Also note that data on donations is voluntary information. For 2017 to 2018, this was provided by 153 (61%) retailers and for 2018 to 2019 this was provided by 121 (55%) retailers. The headline figures on donations are therefore not directly comparable. This is particularly the case where any of the main retailers have decided not to provide this information.

Additionally, the sale of single use carrier bags may vary over the course of a year due to various reasons including seasonality of sales, and therefore, a direct comparison of the full years of data 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 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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