

Methodological summary on carrier bags data

2016/17 is the first full year of reporting. The initial report published in July 2016 covered only a 6 month period from October 2015 to 6 April 2016.

For 2016/17, a total of 261 large retailers registered and 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 2016 to 6 April 2017 a retailer must record details on the website by 31 May 2017. Retailers can be fined if they don't submit records on time.

Improvements were made to the central reporting website for 2016/17 data which included pre-registration checks to ensure that only those large retailers with employees of 250 and above who falls within the scope of the carrier bags scheme were captured (see data coverage below). 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 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.

- 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.
- 13 (5%) retailers that submitted data last year have moved on to issuing either paper bags or re-useable bags. They had previously reported sales which accounted for around 0.2% (2.3 million) of the total number of single use bags in the 6 month reporting period for 2015/16.
- 9 (3%) retailers that submitted data last year did not fall within the category of large retailers as a result did not provide data this year and 2 had stopped trading. Together these retailers had previously provided about 0.9 million single use carrier bags (0.09%) of the total in the six month period for October 2015 to March 2016.
- There are a small number of retailers that provided data for the first time this year and did not report in 2015/16. They accounted for 2.6 million single use carrier bags out of the 2.1 billion recorded this year (less than 1% of the total). There are also a small number of retailers that submitted data in 2015/16 but did not submit this year and have not responded to reminders for response or provided explanation for not providing data. These retailers contributed nearly 2.5 million to the total in 2015/16 (less than 1% of the total).
- There may be inconsistencies in the way companies/retailers have registered their data for 2016/17, due to either company name change or individuals registering their data onto the portal. This year companies/retailers were expected to directly register onto the portal compared with last year.

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 261 large retailers reported single-use carrier bags data in 2016/17.

Direct comparison of data/ Seasonality effects

The sale of single use carrier bags may vary over the course of a year due to various reasons including seasonality of sales, therefore, the direct comparison of the full year data for 2016/17 to the previous six month data for 2015/16 is **not** appropriate. Also note that data on donations is voluntary information. In 2015/16 this was provided by 195 (68%)

retailers and in 2016/17 this was provided by 168 (64%) retailers. The headline figures on donations are therefore not directly comparable.

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:

Waste and Recycling Statistics
Defra
2B Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

Tel: 08459 33 55 77

Email: PlasticBagCharge@defra.gsi.gov.uk

July 2017