



THE TRUTHS BEHIND IRELAND'S PLASTIC BAG TAX

1. **MYTH: Ireland's 2002 bag tax led to a 95 percent reduction in plastic bag use.**

REALITY: The plastic bag tax resulted in *more* plastic bags being used in Ireland after the tax than before it.¹ The tax eliminated plastic shopping bags in Ireland, but didn't stop consumers from using plastic bags. In fact, the total amount of plastic bags used in Ireland increased by 10 percent. While sales of plastic shopping bags declined almost 90 percent; sales of other plastic bags, such as garbage bags, increased by 400 percent.

2. **MYTH: The plastic bag tax solved Ireland's litter and landfill problems.**

REALITY: Plastic bags were a small component of litter before and after the tax. Prior to the bag tax, the 2001 Annual Report from the National Litter Monitoring System indicated that plastic shopping bags were only .075 percent of the litter stream. The Irish Government has not proven that there has been any reduction in volume or weight of litter or waste going to landfills since their bag tax commenced operation. Further, retailers have switched to paper bags which require 220 percent more energy to produce and release 300 percent more greenhouse gas emissions than plastic bags.² In the US, plastic bags make up a tiny fraction (less than 0.5 percent) of the municipal solid waste stream.³

3. **MYTH: Bag taxes save oil resources.**

REALITY: In the United States, nearly 80 percent of the raw material used to make plastic bags is produced from domestic natural gas, not oil.⁴ Plastic bags manufactured in the United States are made out of polyethylene. Polyethylene is made from ethylene which is made from ethane. Ethane is extracted from natural gas or in some cases plants. In addition, the weight and volume of paper versus plastic bags has environmental consequences in their transport because it takes seven trucks to haul 2 million paper bags while it only takes one truck to haul the same number of plastic bags.⁵

4. **MYTH: Retailers in Ireland are benefitting from the plastic bag tax.**

REALITY: Retailers in Ireland have reported negative impacts of the bag tax, including the loss of in-store carrying devices and increased shoplifting. RGDATA, the trade body representing small to medium-sized retailers in Ireland, reported the loss of 450 wire baskets and carts per month by each retailer on average – a loss of approximately 24 million Euros per year. According to the January 2003 issue of the Irish retail trade journal *Shelf Life*, the tax has also led to an increase in instances of shoppers filling their carts and walking out of the store without paying at a cost to retailers of 10 million Euros per year.

5. **Ireland's bag tax has been a successful initiative.**

REALITY: The bag tax in Ireland has been a loss, not a win, for consumers, retailers, workers, businesses *and* the environment.

¹ PIFA, 2004 (also validated by the Scottish Parliament ERDC Committee – Economic and Rural Development Committee) PIFA/Mike Kidwell Associates 2006

² Ecobilan PwC, Paris Life Cycle Study, 2004

³ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Municipal Waste in the United States: 2006 Facts and Figures*. See: <http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/muncpl/msw99.htm>

⁴ US Department of Energy, National Renewable Energy Laboratory, US Life Cycle Inventory Database, <http://www.nrel.gov/lci/>

⁵ Ecobilan PwC, Paris Life Cycle Study, 2004

