

Banning of single-use plastic bags

During the conference “Plastic in the Mediterranean: Beyond Observation, What Are the Solutions?”, which was held at the Yacht Club de Monaco in March 2015, H.S.H. the Sovereign Prince announced that single-use plastic bags would be banned from 2016 in Monaco.

This is a tough but necessary measure, considering that a significant majority of environmental waste is plastic, and that this plastic is found in the sea.

The objective behind banning such bags is to substantially reduce the amount of this plastic waste, with the following positive consequences:

- * reduction of the pollution of oceans and seas caused by the spread of plastic particles produced as plastic bags break down;
- * conservation of natural resources through limiting production of bags;
- * conservation of marine biodiversity;
- * increased awareness on the part of local stakeholders (distributors, retailers and consumers) of the impact of their lifestyles on the environment.

AS OF 1 JUNE 2016, IT IS PROHIBITED TO MAKE AVAILABLE, FREE OR FOR A CHARGE, THE FOLLOWING:

- * Single-use checkout bags made wholly or in part from fossil plastics, which are less than 50 microns thick or have an internal volume of less than 25 litres. Only one of these conditions needs to apply to prohibit the distribution of the bag.
- * Bags made from oxo-fragmentable plastics (i.e. plastics which break down into micro-particles that are invisible but nonetheless present in the environment).

Plastic bags which are at least 50 microns thick or have a minimum volume of 25 litres, whether or not they are made from bio-based materials, will still be permitted.

FROM 1 JANUARY 2017, THE FOLLOWING WILL BE PROHIBITED:

All other single-use bags designed for packing goods at the point of sale (for example, small bags provided in the fruit and vegetables section), which are not compostable and are made of less than 30% bio-based materials. This proportion will increase progressively to reach 60% by 2025.

FROM 1 JANUARY 2020, ALL DISPOSABLE PLASTIC UTENSILS WILL BE PROHIBITED.

THIS MEASURE IS PART OF A BROADER APPROACH TO ENCOURAGE RESPONSIBLE COMMERCE.

In 2014, the Government launched the “Responsible Commerce” initiative to encourage producers, retailers and consumers in the Principality to adopt environmentally responsible practices.

The Department of the Environment leads this initiative through a committee made up of representatives from the Monaco Union of Traders and Artisans, Monaco City Hall and the Prince Albert II Foundation.

The key elements of the initiative relate to reducing waste and greenhouse gas emissions.

As part of the “Responsible Commerce” initiative, the Department of the Environment has met more than 200 retailers who use plastic bags since the beginning of 2015. The information gathered focused on the nature and use of plastic bags, the feasible alternatives and, more widely, waste management and recycling.

The study showed that:

- * 95% of Monegasque retailers consider environmental protection to be a subject which is important or of concern to them;
- * 71% of retailers give out single-use plastic bags;
- * Four businesses distribute a total of more than 1.1 million bags per year;
- * 73% of retailers believe that too many plastic bags are given out;
- * 49% of retailers give out plastic bags, 32% give out paper bags and 16% give out biodegradable bags;
- * 96% of plastic bags are given away free of charge;

* 56% of businesses distribute reusable bags, of which 44% are cardboard, 35% plastic and 13% fabric.

These results demonstrate that retailers are aware of environmental issues and the Government's initiative to get rid of single-use plastic bags.

The "Responsible Commerce" initiative is intended to lead to the implementation of a label in consultation with retailers. The aim is to introduce concrete actions such as getting rid of single-use plastic bags, encouraging widespread use of returnable bottles, promoting short supply chains, reusing packaging, increasing the level of waste sorting, etc.

The action programme currently focuses as a priority on improving waste sorting and supporting all retailers with regard to the future bans covered by the Sovereign Ordinance:

* The banning of all other single-use bags used to pack goods at the point of sale in 2017;

* The banning of disposable plastic utensils in 2020.

ALTERNATIVES TO PLASTIC BAGS:

Scientific studies show that at present, no type of plastic bag (polyethylene, oxo-fragmentable, biodegradable, bio-based, etc.) intended for single use (even those which are labelled) is satisfactory from the point of view of an analysis of its lifecycle.

The same is true for paper bags, whether or not they carry the PEFC label.

The key to reducing the environmental impact of bags is to reuse them.

There is therefore a need to encourage the use and reuse of bags made from natural materials or, failing that, tote-style plastic bags.

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN:

The Government is mounting an awareness campaign about the ban and why it is needed, using the slogan “a bag for life”.

To support the measure banning single-use plastic bags, the Government has decided to give every household in the Principality a reusable fabric (organic cotton) bag, which will be accompanied by a flyer explaining the initiative.

The bags will be distributed via the postal service during September. They come from a French-based company and are made using organic cotton cultivated under fair conditions in India.