

Irish bag tax hailed success

A tax on plastic shopping bags in the Republic of Ireland has cut their use by more than 90% and raised millions of euros in revenue, the government says.

The tax of 15 cents per bag was introduced five months ago in an attempt to curb litter, and the improvement had been immediate and "plain to see", said Environment Minister Martin Cullen.

He said that the 3.5 million euros in extra revenue raised so far would be spent on environmental projects.

"The levy has been an outstanding success in achieving what it set out to do."
Environment Minister Martin Cullen

The "plastax" is being closely watched by other countries, particularly neighbouring Britain.

Bangladesh has banned polystyrene bags altogether while Taiwan and Singapore are taking steps to discourage their use.

"The levy has been an outstanding success in achieving what it set out to do," said Mr Cullen.

"Over one billion plastic bags will be removed from circulation while raising funding for future environmentally friendly initiatives."

He added: "It is clear that the levy has not only changed consumer behaviour in relation to disposable plastic bags, it has also raised national consciousness about the role each one of us can, and must play if we are to tackle collectively the problems of litter and waste management."

Windblown litter

The environment ministry estimated that about 1.2 billion free plastic bags were being handed out every year in the republic, leaving windblown bags littering Irish streets and the countryside.

In the three months after the tax was introduced, shops handed out just over 23 million plastic bags – about 277 million fewer than normal, the government said.

Shoppers are being encouraged to use tougher, reusable bags.

The ministry said that if the current trend continued, the tax would bring in 10 million euros in a full year.

Other countries around the world are also taking action to curb plastic bag litter.

In March, Bangladesh banned polythene bags after it was found that they were blocking drainage systems and had been a major culprit during the 1988 and 1998 floods that submerged two-thirds of the country.

Taiwan and Singapore are also moving to ban free plastic bags and in South Africa they have been dubbed the "national flower" because so many can be seen flapping from fences and caught in bushes.

Find this article at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2205419.stm>

Published: 2002/08/20 14:36 GMT 15:36 UK

© BBC MMVIII