

Position of European Bioplastics

PLASTIC SHOPPING BAGS

European Bioplastics recognises the need for a more resource efficient and sustainable economy. An overall reduction in the consumption of plastic shopping bags will play an important role achieving this goal.

Position:

European Bioplastics advocates the introduction of measures to minimise the consumption of oil-based plastic shopping bags.

European Bioplastics supports two measures:

- a ban on plastic shopping bags
- a tax or charge on plastic shopping bags.

European Bioplastics advocates the following exceptions to offer consumers and retailers an alternative solution:

- 1) Plastic shopping bags containing at least 50 percent biobased content should be exempted from the ban or tax in all countries.
- 2) Compostable EN13432 compliant plastic shopping bags that contain at least 50 percent biobased content should be exempted from the ban or tax in countries where organic waste is recovered and organically recycled.¹

Key arguments for the exemption of bioplastic shopping bags:

- The biobased content of bioplastic shopping bags ensures that they have a lower carbon footprint than oil-based bags, helping to reduce CO₂ emissions.²
- In countries where organic waste is collected, compostable bags can be used to collect organic waste, in effect making it a dual use bag. Studies³ have shown that compostable biowaste bags help to increase the amount of biowaste collected and improve the quality of compost. Dual use also reduces the number of bags that are thrown away or end up in landfills.
- In countries where plastic waste is recovered for recycling, the bioplastic shopping bags can be mechanically recycled into new plastic products.
- In countries where waste is incinerated, the biobased content contributes to the generation of renewable energy.
- European Bioplastics does not support landfill as a viable end-of-life option. However, in case of bioplastic shopping bags ending up in landfill, the biobased content will help to 'sequester' CO₂.

¹ Countries with organic waste recovery and organic waste recycling infrastructure include: BE, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE, SK, UK. (Source: ORBIT/ECN (2008)). Organic waste recycling includes composting and/or anaerobic digestion.

² nova-institute: www.nova-institut.de/.../Meta-LCA%20Publication; Bioplastics: A case study of the bioeconomy in Italy http://freebook.edizioniambiente.it/libro/77/pd_modello-

³ BASF: <http://www.basf.com/group/pressemitteilungen/P-12-179>

Additional information about bioplastic shopping bags:

Compostable carrier bags offer benefits to biowaste management.

Biobased plastic shopping bags:

- A shopping bag is biobased if a significant part of the plastic from which it is made stems from renewable raw materials. The term biobased describes the part of a material or product that comes from renewable resources / biomass.
- The percentage and the measuring method should be clearly stated when making a biobased claim. Certification and labelling schemes are in place to help substantiate claims.
- Biobased does NOT necessarily mean compostable.
- Biobased PE shopping bags can be mechanically recycled together with conventional PE in the PE recycling stream.
- Biobased bags should be certified and clearly labelled.

Biobased carrier bags offer benefits in terms of carbon footprint.

Compostable plastic shopping bags:

- A shopping bag is biodegradable if the bag can be quickly decomposed by biological activity. Only

water, carbon dioxide and biomass remain at the end of this composting process.

- The European standard EN 13432 defines the biodegradation criteria for industrial compostability of packaging products in industrial composting plants.
- European Bioplastics recommends EN 13432 as the key standard for certifying compostable bags.
- Biodegradability is linked to the chemical structure of the polymer; a compostable bag can therefore be either biobased or oil-based.
- In order to make accurate claims about industrial compostability, companies should reference EN 13432.
- Compostable shopping bags are typically made from PLA/PBAT/starch blends.
- Compostable bags should be certified and clearly labelled.

Bioplastic bags – not an excuse for littering!

Littering is not a product problem intrinsic to shopping bags. It is caused by careless disposal behaviour on the part of the consumer and poor waste management in some areas. Bioplastics producers, retailers and brand owners should not advertise renewability, biodegradability and compostability of bioplastics bags as a solution to littering.



Shopping bag made of biobased PE at German retailer Rossmann, biobased content at least 50 percent.



Certified compostable shopping bag made of a PLA-blend at Austrian retailer Hofer, biobased content at least 50 percent. (picture: Victor Group)