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EuPC welcomes the recent LCA study on carrier bags performed by Euroconsumers

Press Release

What are environmentally friendly alternatives to single use plastic carrier bags?

Four European consumer associations, namely Test-Achats from Belgium, Altroconsumo – Associazione di Consumatori Italiana from Italy, DECO – Associação Portuguesa para a Defesa do Consumidor from Portugal and OCU – Organización de Consumidores y Usuarios from Spain conducted a study, certified by Professor Roland Clift (CBE, FREng, FICHEM, FRSA, HonFCIWEM), on Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) for supermarket shopping containers, and the outcomes are clear.

The purpose of the LCA method used in this work is to analyse the environmental impacts of shopping containers and processes as well as to quantify the environmental consequences of human actions.

Recommendations are made to consumers, manufacturers but also retailers. As stated in the study, it is important to ***“communicate only true information regarding the bag. It is useless to communicate that an alternative is “sustainable”, “green” or “ecological” if it has more environmental impacts than other solutions”***.



Examples of the three types of shopping containers analysed in this study. Photo by DECO PROTESTE



The LCA study makes also the following three recommendations:

- **Recommendations for consumers**
 - If you forget the reusable bag at home or in the car, choose to buy an LDPE plastic bag that incorporates recycled material. This bag will have less environmental impact than paper bags, for example. Compostable plastic bags are also a good alternative.
 - Do not buy reusable bags made of cotton (regular or bio) and jute. These are a bad alternative, as they have far greater environmental impacts than polyester or PP alternatives.

- **Recommendations for manufacturers**
 - Give preference to manufacturers located in Europe over manufacturers located in Asia. In addition to the impacts that are avoided due to a shorter distance traveled in the distribution of bags (it is estimated that these impacts can be reduced by between 52% and 78%), the environmental impacts associated with energy consumption are also lower in Europe (estimates that these impacts can be reduced by 90%).

- **Recommendations for retailers**
 - Always make several solutions available to consumers. It is not good practice to stop marketing single-use bags and oblige consumers to always buy a reusable bag. If the consumer constantly forgets the reusable bag at home, the environmental impacts are far greater than if the consumer were to buy only single use bags.
 - Providing only paper bags can also be bad practice. For example, if it is a supermarket and only has paper bags, the consumer will be obliged to carry frozen products in this bag, which may not resist until they get home. Even if it gets home, its reuse will be practically impossible.
 - Communicate the environmental impacts of the various alternatives so that the consumer can make an informed and conscientious decision.

EuPC fully agrees with these recommendations: right things have to be done to further promote the efforts already undertaken for advancing our industry's transition to circularity. Alternatives to plastic carrier bags with recycled content are worse for the environment and it is good that consumers are made aware of this.

If you want to get a copy of this study to read it, please contact us.



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