

Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy, Annual Statistics 2021/22



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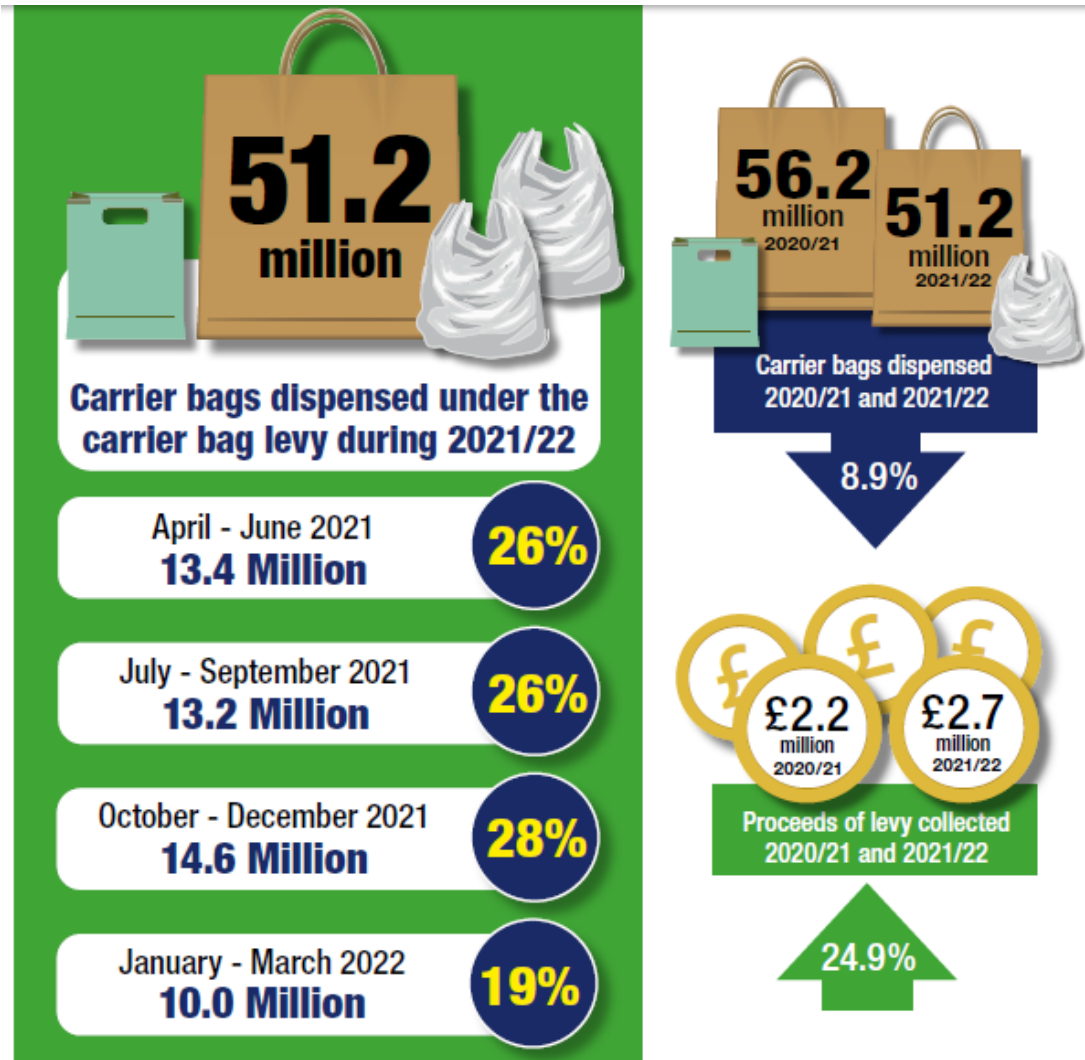
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Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy Annual Statistics 2021/22



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Key points

- During the ninth year of operation, 51.2 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland.
- This was 8.9 per cent lower than the previous year, with 5 million fewer bags dispensed. The number of lower rate bags dispensed decreased by 7.6 per cent between 2020/21 and 2021/22 while the number of upper rate bags dispensed decreased by 10.3 per cent.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2021/22 is still markedly lower than the baseline figure prior to the introduction of the levy, which was estimated at 300 million bags in 2012. Year 9 of the 5 pence levy saw an 82.9 per cent reduction in bag numbers dispensed annually compared to the baseline.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2021/22 totalled £2.7 million, an increase of £0.5 million (24.9%) from the previous year.

Coverage: Northern Ireland
Frequency: Annual
Reporting Period: 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, referred to as 2021/22
Next update: Data for 2022/23 will be published in August 2023

URL: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics

Introduction

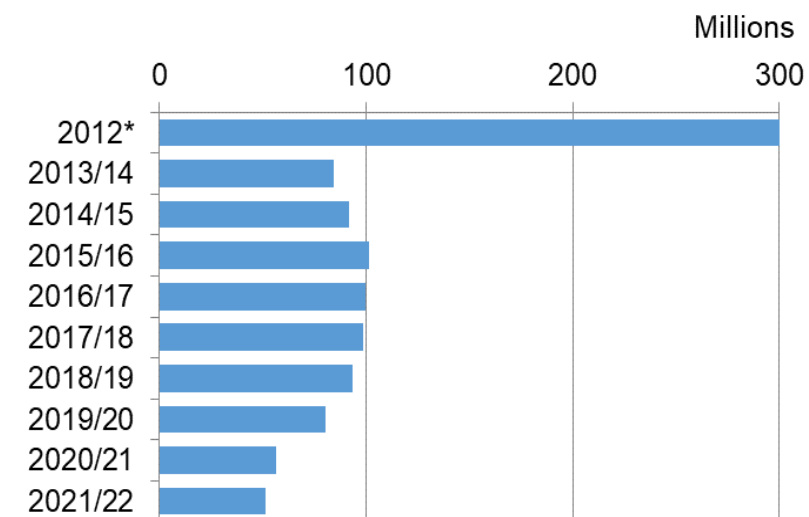
The purpose of this publication is to report on the number of carrier bags dispensed under the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2021/22. The figures relate to the number of bags dispensed by retailers between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 as notified to the Department by 30 June 2022. Users of this report include government policy makers, local government officials, retailers, general public, media and environmental organisations.

Overview

- During the ninth year of operation, 51.2 million carrier bags were dispensed by retailers under the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These annual statistics include carrier bags sold by retailers for less than 20 pence.
- The total number was 8.9 per cent lower than the previous year, with 5 million fewer bags dispensed. The number of lower rate bags dispensed decreased by 7.6 per cent between 2020/21 and 2021/22 while the number of upper rate bags dispensed decreased by 10.3 per cent.
- The number of carrier bags dispensed in 2021/22 is still markedly lower than the baseline figure prior to the introduction of the levy, which was estimated at 300 million bags in 2012. Year 9 of the 5p levy saw an 82.9 per cent reduction in bag numbers dispensed annually compared to the baseline figure which meant approximately 248.8 million fewer bags in circulation in 2021/22 and an estimated 1.9 billion fewer since the introduction of the levy.
- The proceeds of the levy for 2021/22 totalled £2.7 million, an increase of £0.5 million (24.9%) from the previous year. They cannot be directly calculated from bag usage figures due to differences in timing and recording. Proceeds are taken from audited departmental financial accounts which include money actually received into the department between 1 April 2021

and 31 March 2022, whereas the number of carrier bags dispensed refer to declarations made by retailers for the same period.

Figure 1: Carrier bags dispensed by year
Northern Ireland, 2012 to 2021/22



*estimated figure for 2012 calendar year

Note: The scope of the carrier bag levy was extended during the last quarter of 2014/15. This contributed to the increases shown in reported bag numbers after 2013/14.

Seasonal Variation and Trends

The total number of bags dispensed in 2021/22 was 51.2 million which is an overall decrease of 8.9 per cent and equates to 5 million fewer bags dispensed since 2020/21.

Lower rate bags are those costing the customer only the 5 pence levy whereas **upper rate** bags are those which are priced at more than the 5 pence levy but less than 20 pence.

The number of lower rate bags dispensed fell by 7.6 per cent to 26.2 million bags while the number of upper rate bags dispensed fell by 10.3 per cent to 25.0 million bags.

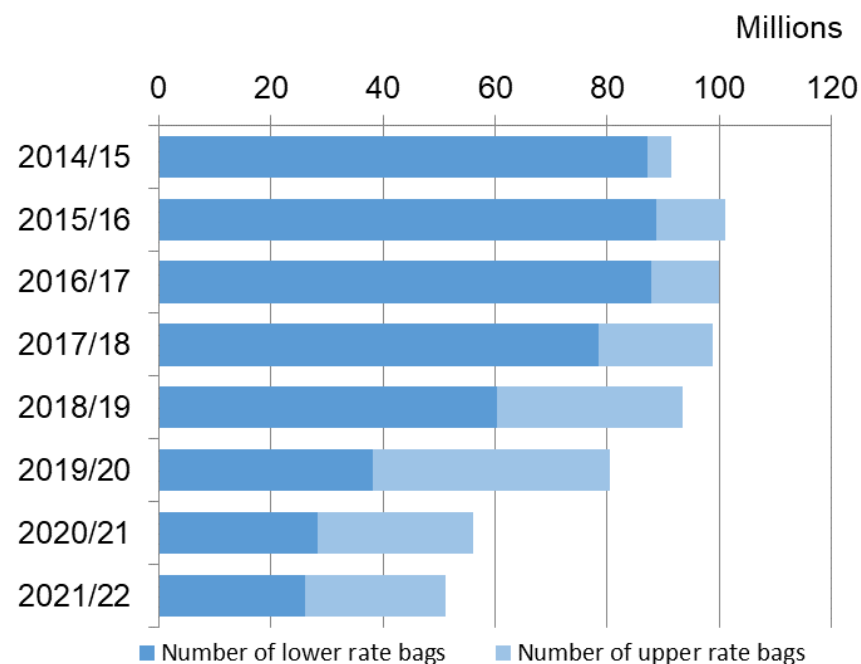
Until 2019/20 the majority of bags dispensed in Northern Ireland were lower rate bags. In both 2020/21 and 2021/22 years, the proportion of lower and upper rate bags dispensed under the levy were approximately equal. Figure 2 illustrates how the proportion of upper rate bags have been increasing until 2019/20 while the total number of bags dispensed under the levy has been decreasing since 2015/16.

In 2021/22 retailers in Northern Ireland dispensed 13.4 million bags during quarter 1 (April to June 2021), 13.2 million during quarter 2 (July to September 2021) and 14.6 million during quarter 3 (October to December 2021). The number of bags dispensed during quarter 4 (January to March 2022) reduced to 10 million which was the lowest number recorded for a quarter since the levy was introduced.

As shown in Figure 3, the pattern has largely returned to pre-covid trends with a peak in bags dispensed under the levy recorded in quarter 3 (October to December). Some Covid-19 restrictions remained in 2021/22 but they were not as severe as those first imposed in April 2020. Retailers have also continued to increase the price of their bags to 20 pence and above with many now dispensing heavier duty bags which are currently outside the scope of the levy and therefore not included in these statistics.

Figure 3 also shows that upper rate bag numbers peaked at 11.6 million in quarter 3 2019/20 and show a generally decreasing trend since then. In relation to lower rate bags, the long term trend has been a steady reduction in numbers and use of lower rate bags.

Figure 2: Carrier bags dispensed by rate
Northern Ireland, 2014/15 to 2021/22

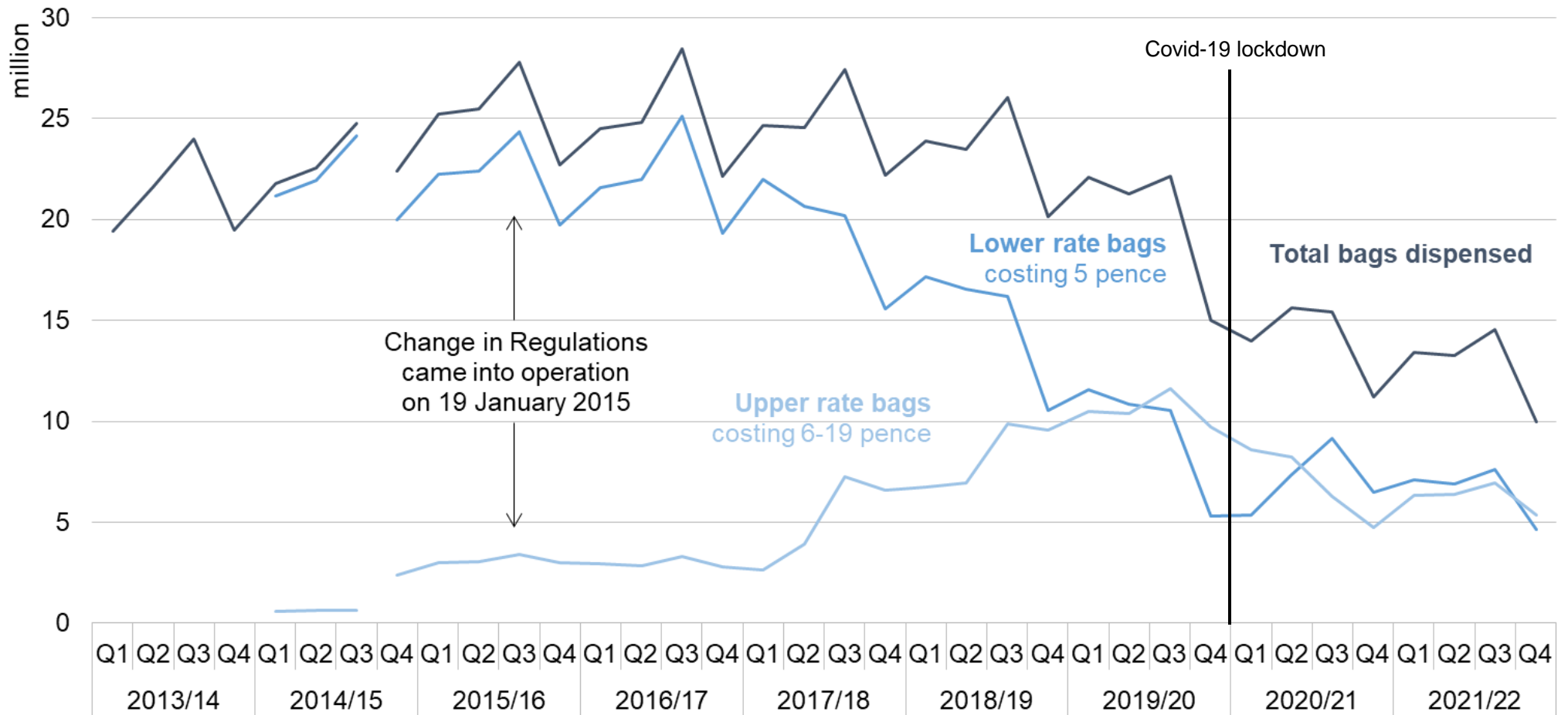


Looking at the percentage change in total bag numbers dispensed compared to the same quarters last year, all showed reductions with the largest decrease recorded in quarter 2 (15.1%).

Lower rate bags decreased in all quarters except quarter 1 in 2021/22 when compared to the same quarter in 2020/21. Lower rates bags dispensed in April to June 2020 were at a particularly low level due to the restrictions imposed at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Upper rate bags recorded a decrease in numbers when comparing quarter 1 and 2 of 2021/22 to 2020/21. However, in quarters 3 and 4 there was an increase in upper rate bag numbers recorded compared to 2020/21.

Figure 3: Number of carrier bags dispensed by quarter, year and rate
Northern Ireland, Q1 2013/14 to Q4 2021/22



Tables

Table 1: Total carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2017/18 to 2021/22

Quarter						<i>Millions</i>	
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	<i>Difference in latest year</i>	<i>Percentage change in latest year</i>
April to June	24,635,285	23,854,385	22,082,691	13,960,084	13,421,490	-538,594	-3.9%
July to September	24,557,005	23,466,144	21,238,126	15,595,341	13,242,120	-2,353,221	-15.1%
October to December	27,432,279	26,045,800	22,133,230	15,417,718	14,555,683	-862,035	-5.6%
January to March	22,194,900	20,132,635	15,026,910	11,198,697	9,958,970	-1,239,727	-11.1%
Total	98,819,469	93,498,964	80,480,957	56,171,840	51,178,263	-4,993,577	-8.9%

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

Table 2: Lower rate carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2017/18 to 2021/22

Quarter						<i>Millions</i>	
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	<i>Difference in latest year</i>	<i>Percentage change in latest year</i>
April to June	21,982,429	17,134,322	11,588,853	5,350,858	7,082,667	1,731,809	32.4%
July to September	20,638,358	16,542,143	10,837,871	7,365,200	6,883,122	-482,078	-6.5%
October to December	20,169,355	16,191,428	10,526,863	9,144,671	7,600,952	-1,543,719	-16.9%
January to March	15,581,097	10,557,398	5,315,467	6,466,195	4,621,031	1,845,164	-28.5%
Total	78,371,239	60,425,291	38,269,054	28,326,924	26,187,772	-2,139,152	-7.6%

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

*Bags at the **lower rate** are those only costing the customer the 5p levy.*

Table 3: Upper rate carrier bags dispensed by quarter and year

Northern Ireland, 2017/18 to 2021/22

Quarter						<i>Millions</i>	
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	<i>Difference in latest year</i>	<i>Percentage change in latest year</i>
April to June	2,652,856	6,720,063	10,493,838	8,609,226	6,338,823	-2,270,403	-26.4%
July to September	3,918,647	6,924,001	10,400,255	8,230,141	6,358,998	-1,871,143	-22.7%
October to December	7,262,924	9,854,372	11,606,367	6,273,047	6,954,731	681,684	10.9%
January to March	6,613,803	9,575,237	9,711,443	4,732,502	5,337,939	605,437	12.8%
Total	20,448,230	33,073,673	42,211,903	27,844,916	24,990,491	-2,854,425	-10.3%

*As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.**Bags at the **upper rate** are those which have had a price added by the retailer in advance of the 5p levy being applied.***Table 4: Proportion of upper and lower rate bags by year**

Northern Ireland, 2017/18 to 2021/22

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Lower rate bags	79%	65%	48%	50%	51%
Upper rate bags	21%	35%	52%	50%	49%
Total bags	98,819,469	93,498,964	80,480,957	56,171,840	51,178,263

As notified to the Department by 30th June each financial year.

From 19 January 2015 the levy was extended hence lower and upper rate didn't apply prior to this. See the Background to Regulations section for more information. The effect of this change on the numbers dispensed is discussed in more detail in the 2015/16 carrier bag levy report, available from www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics.

Tables providing information from 2013/14 are provided in spreadsheet format www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-carrier-bag-levy-statistics.

Carrier Bags Charge Regulations

The Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 were made on 15 January 2013 and came into operation on 8 April 2013. From that date, all sellers of goods in Northern Ireland had to charge their customers at least 5 pence (“the levy”) for each single use carrier bag supplied new. From 19 January 2015, the levy was extended to all carrier bags with a retail price of less than 20 pence, whether they are considered single use or reusable.

- Bags at the **lower rate** are those costing the customer only the 5p levy.
- Bags at the **upper rate** are those which have had a price added by the retailer in advance of the 5p levy being applied.

Prior to 19 January 2015 the levy covered single use carrier bags, typically costing 5 pence. Retailers could charge more than 5 pence however this was uncommon with upper rate bags accounting for just 3% of total bags dispensed. After the levy was extended the numbers of upper rate bags increased as more bags fell within the scope of the Regulations. The extension specifically targeted all carrier bags with a retail price of less than 20 pence, which included lower-priced reusable bags. The number of upper rate carrier bags dispensed between January and March 2015 i.e. immediately after the extension, was 2.4 million bags, approximately 1.8 million greater than each of the three preceding quarters. Following the change in regulations the number of upper rate bags dispensed ranged between 2.8 to 3.4 million per quarter in 2015/16 and 2016/17. Up until 2019/20 there was a strong increase in the number of upper rate bags with an average of 10.6 million bags dispensed per quarter in that year. Upper rate bag numbers reduced in 2020/21 so that the proportion of lower and upper bags are now equal. Similar proportions of upper and lower rate bags continued in 2021/22. It should also be noted that a number of retailers, as part of their internal pricing policy, increased the price of their low cost reusable bags to 20 pence or above, thereby ensuring such bags were outside the scope of the levy.

On 1st April 2020, the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations across Northern Ireland were temporarily amended to exempt carrier bags used for home grocery delivery in line with the other UK administrations and in seeking to ensure customer safety. This exemption expired on 30th September 2020.

Provisional results from the Continuous Household Survey environmental module are published in the [Environmental Statistics Report](#) and show that 82% of respondents in the 2021/22 survey were reported to be very/fairly concerned about environmental issues. Whilst this matched the previous highest figures recorded in 2008/09 and 2020/21, caution should be used when comparing 2021/22 to historical data due to changes introduced to the survey in response to the Covid-19 pandemic as outlined in the ESR user guidance. The survey also showed that most respondents selected that they had Reused, Recycled and disposed of waste products appropriately which would include the reusing of carrier bags.

Questions regarding carrier bags were introduced to the Continuous Household Survey in 2020/21. Household respondents were asked how much they paid for the last carrier bag they bought. 2021/22 results show that more than a third (34 per cent) responded that they did not buy a carrier bag, whilst 24 per cent bought bags costing 5 pence, with another 22 per cent buying bags costing 6p - 19 pence.

From 1st April 2022, the Carrier Bags Charge Regulations were extended so that the levy is 25p and applies to all new carrier bags with a retail price of £5 or less. This is regardless of the material used and whether they are single use or reusable. Data from 1 April 2022 will be reflected in the annual statistics for 2022/23 published in August 2023.

Background information

1. This is the ninth year of the carrier bag levy in Northern Ireland. These are the final official statistics for 2021/22. The statistics refer to all bags made of any material, not solely plastic bags. The Department intends to publish 2022/23 figures in August 2023. [Statistical reports](#) from previous years can be accessed online.
2. Bags which are exempt from the levy, such as those used solely to contain unpackaged raw food or hot foods / hot drinks, are not included in the data. Retailers are not required to record this information. The main exemptions are listed on carrier bag levy section of nidirect and the full list is available from Schedule 1 of the Regulations.
 - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/carrier-bag-levy>
 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2013/4/regulation/1/made>
 - http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/7/pdfs/nia_20140007_en.pdf
3. The figures are based on data supplied by 2,187 retailers in Northern Ireland as notified to the Department by 30 June 2022. Note that this is not the number of actual premises at which carrier bags are dispensed, as one retailer can submit returns for more than one outlet.
4. The Department's estimate of the number of bags dispensed in 2012 (300 million) is derived from UK-wide Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) data for 2008. The data were adjusted to take account of reductions in bag usage as a result of voluntary retailer measures since 2008.
5. The figures presented in the release will not equate precisely to the total bags dispensed in the year due to the 30 June cut-off date applied for the production of Official Statistics. Using recent declaration figures for comparison, it is estimated that the number of bags notified by 30 June is on average 4% lower than the actual total number of bags dispensed in that year.

6. Company returns are audited by Carrier Bag Levy Team, which has responsibility for administration and collection of the levy and ensuring that sellers comply with the Regulations. Guidance on carrier bag levy enforcement is available [online](#). Initial validation checks are carried out by Carrier Bag Levy Team with further validation by Statistics and Analytical Service Branch in DAERA. Any discrepancies are queried with Carrier Bag Levy Team. More information on the quality assurance of these statistics is available in the [data quality report](#).
7. These statistics are released according to the [Statement of Compliance](#) with the Pre-release access to Official Statistics Order (NI) 2009. Official Statistics are produced to a high professional standard. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. As we want to engage with users of our statistics, we invite you to feedback your comments on this publication. Contact details are included on page one.

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