



For immediate release

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EuPF presses environmental record of plastics bags

Measures taken against plastic bags are unlikely to bring net environmental gain, said European Plastic Films, a EuPC sector group this week. They will only put thousands of jobs in the industry at risk. The Brussels-based trade body explained that plastic bags are popular with consumers and retailers as they are a functional, lightweight, strong, cheap, and hygienic way to transport food and other products. They make up only a small percentage of all litter. The plastics bags industry in Europe consists of over 500 companies employing more than 50.000 persons in its production facilities and supply chain.

'Abandoning plastic bags may not be as environmentally friendly as people think', says Bjørn Hoem, President of European Plastic Film. 'Production and transport of paper bags, which are 10 times heavier than plastic, produce more of the greenhouse gases blamed for global warming than the lighter alternative', he says.

The industry points out that new technologies, such as bio-plastics are also being commercially introduced and biodegradable plastic bags and packaging are becoming an attractive option to the food packaging industry. They are, however, not a solution to replacing non-degradable plastic bags in supermarkets and retail outlets, as they do not decompose in a predictable way in properly managed landfills. Their use also supports a 'throwaway' mindset and a reliance on the use of landfills as a disposal method. They do nothing to discourage over-use in the first place.

EuPF believes that in order to reduce plastic packaging in the waste stream, re-use of bags and recycling of plastics are better alternatives to banning plastic bags. *'We want to promote sustainability by moving away from the single-use and disposability mentality towards that of maximizing the utility of everything we use, and thus protecting the environment. Continuous education is the key.'* said Hoem.

EuPF also makes the point that whilst several countries have taken severe measures to restrict plastic bags; many initiatives have been misinterpreted and are not seen in their proper context. There have been some cases where restrictions have been against bags of all types, but where reporting has focussed exclusively on the plastics component. EuPF says it must also be kept in mind that many countries taking initiatives against bags have quite different waste management systems and cultures to those in Europe. The rigour of an EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive is in not in force everywhere in the world and in some countries consumers are not as well educated and disciplined as they are in Europe.

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