Packaging and packaging waste: reduction of the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags

2013/0371(COD) - 29/04/2015 - Final act

PURPOSE: to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags in order to limit the negative impact of these bags on the environment, to prevent littering and to reach a more efficient use of resources.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Directive (EU) 2015/720 of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 94/62/EC as regards reducing the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags.

CONTENT: the Directive concerns plastic carrier bags with a wall thickness below 50 microns (lightweight plastic carrier bags), which represent the vast majority of the total number of plastic carrier bags consumed in the Union, are less frequently reused than thicker plastic carrier bags. It amends Directive 94/62/EC which obliges Member States to take measures to **reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags**.

Prevention measures: those measures may include the use of **national reduction targets**, maintaining or introducing **economic instruments** (such as pricing, taxes and levies) as well as marketing restrictions (such as bans). The measures taken by Member States shall include either or both of the following:

- the adoption of measures ensuring that the annual consumption level does not exceed **90 lightweight plastic carrier bags** per person by 31 December 2019 and **40 lightweight plastic carrier bags** per person by 31 December 2025, or equivalent targets set in weight;
- the adoption of instruments ensuring that, **by 31 December 2018, lightweight plastic carrier bags are not provided free of charge at the point of sale of goods or products**, unless equally effective instruments are implemented.

Member States may choose to **exempt plastic carrier bags** with a wall thickness below 15 microns (‘very lightweight plastic carrier bags’) provided as primary packaging for loose food when required for hygiene purposes or when their use helps prevent food wastage.

From 27 May 2018 Member States shall **report on the annual consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags** when providing data on packaging and packaging waste to the Commission.

The Directive stipulates that:

- Member States may take measures such as economic instruments and national reduction targets, as regards any kind of plastic carrier bags, regardless of their wall thickness;
- the Commission and the Member States shall, at least during the first year following the 27 November 2016, actively **encourage public information and awareness campaigns;**
- by 27 May 2016, the Commission shall adopt an implementing act laying down **the methodology for the calculation of the annual consumption** of lightweight plastic carrier bags per person and adapting the reporting formats.

Biodegradable and compostable plastic carrier bags: by 27 May 2017, the Commission shall adopt an implementing act laying down the **specifications of labels or marks** to ensure Union-wide recognition of biodegradable and compostable plastic carrier bags and to provide consumers with the correct information about the composting properties of such bags.

18 months after the adoption of that implementing act, at the latest, Member States shall ensure that biodegradable and compostable plastic carrier bags are labelled in accordance with the specifications provided for in that implementing act.

The Commission should ask the European Committee for Standardization to develop a **separate standard for home-compostable packaging**.

Reporting on plastic bags: by 27 November 2021, the Commission shall present a report **assessing the effectiveness of measures** at Union level, in combating littering, changing consumer behaviour and promoting waste prevention. If the assessment shows that the measures adopted are not effective, the Commission shall examine other possible ways to achieve a reduction in the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags, including the setting of realistic and achievable targets at Union level, and present a legislative proposal, if appropriate.

By 27 May 2017, the Commission shall:

- present a report examining the impact of the use of **oxo-degradable plastic carrier bags** on the environment and present a legislative proposal, if appropriate;
- assess the **life cycle impacts** of different possibilities to reduce the consumption of very lightweight plastic carrier bags, and present a legislative proposal, if appropriate.

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