Plastic bag ban

The State Council issued a notice on Tuesday requiring all supermarkets, grocery stores and free markets to stop providing free plastic bags from June 1 this year, and called for people to use baskets or cloth bags for shopping.

In fact, a similar ban has been, or is being, rolled out in an increasing number of regions and countries because plastic bags are ending up in landfill sites.

It can take some 300 years for plastic bags to break down. Some of the bags are not even biodegradable.

The notice orders a complete ban on the production and use of ultra-thin plastic bags (thinner than 0.025 mm) that are not biodegradable. New criteria will be made on the production of plastic bags.

It is estimated that millions of plastic bags are used every day in China and billions of yuan is needed every year to treat or recycle them.

Calls for the ban have been made for years but never have we adopted any substantial measures to deal with the issue.

This is not only because most of us take it for granted that free bags must be provided by supermarkets or grocery stores for what we buy, but also a well-administered process is needed for supermarkets, groceries or free markets from handing out free plastic bags to shoppers.

But very few of us can turn a blind eye to the environmental problems plastic bags have caused. What we cannot see directly is the great waste the excessive use of plastic bags has brought about to the already scarce supply of oil resources.

Charging for the use of plastic bags may be a way to wake up the collective unconsciousness about the environmental hazard this invention of the 20th century has caused to our planet.

To prevent the devastation of the environment by plastic bags from becoming worse and the waste they use has incurred, it is absolutely right to ban any market from handing out free plastic bags.

A single notice is not enough for the ban to be administered to the letter by all the supermarkets, grocery stores and free markets. An effective mechanism must be designed by the central authorities to monitor how the ban is carried out at these places.

The notice says that governments at various levels must be responsible for the ban to be placed exactly where they should be, and those who fail to do so will face disciplinary penalties. We hope that the penalties will be severe enough to push relevant departments to pay enough attention to the issue.

Changing bags, changing attitudes

By Wang Ying

From June 1, all shops and supermarkets will be banned from giving away free plastic bags.

And according to media website Sina.com yesterday, 60 percent of the 84,000 people who took part in a recent poll said the ban will greatly affect their lives.

Thirty-six percent said the ban will have little impact, while the rest said they are not sure.

When asked if they will use a cloth bag instead of plastic ones, 52 percent said they will, while 22 percent said they will stick with plastic, even if they have to pay.

From June 1, all carrier bags must be clearly priced, and the government has said the production of ultra-thin plastic bags will be banned.

Chinese people use about 3 billion plastic bags a day and 37 million barrels of crude oil must be refined every year to make plastic bags.

Some supermarkets in the capital, such as Dia Mart, stopped giving out free plastic bags months ago. They charge 0.1 yuan for each bag.

"Discarded plastic bags can be seen everywhere, which is a direct result of them being given out free by shops.

"People don't care about the consequences of such garbage because the bags are free.

"In the past, people used cloth bags or baskets for their vegetables, so we should encourage them to return to that practice. However, it's not something that can be done overnight."

Zeng Suisheng, an official of the Shenzhen legislative affairs office

"This issue of having to pay for plastic bags is maddening. What will people use to carry wet items?

"And does paying 0.1 yuan give you the right to pollute the environment? If so, does that mean that some people have more right to pollute the environment with the bags than others?"

"Using such a method is taking the easy way out. Education is the key to solving the problem."

Lan Man, a netizen

"With the ban, the use of plastic bags is expected to go down by two-thirds nationwide — based on the similar experiences of countries such as Japan, South Korea and France.

"This is a very good policy, but the government needs to come up with possible alternatives for plastic bags."

Dong Jinshi, vice-president of the plastic recycling committee under China's Plastic Association

"We provide free, degradable plastic bags which cost us dearly every year. But even biodegradable bags take 50 years to decompose, so they are not completely green."

"In future, we will position ourselves in line with State policy and provide environmentally friendly bags."

Fu Yu, a store manager with the Wumart Group