

MEPs back plans to slash use of plastic shopping bags

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A man holds a plastic bag in Rome on December 31, 2010

The European Parliament on Wednesday backed plans to slash the use of plastic shopping bags which, carelessly thrown away, end up as unsightly litter and pollute the environment.

The European Union estimates that each citizens uses an average of nearly 200 plastic [bags](#) a year and want that cut by at least 80 percent by

2019.

The initial target is a cut of 50 percent by 2017 compared with 2010 levels when some eight billion such bags ended up as rubbish.

The proposals call on member states to use taxes, levies, marketing restrictions or outright bans to end what has become a scourge of modern living.

Parliament voted "to significantly strengthen draft EU rules aimed at reducing [plastic bag](#) use and waste, notably to include obligatory European reduction targets and a requirement that [plastic](#) bags come at a cost," said Green lawmaker Margrete Auken, who is leading the legislation through the assembly.

Curbs already introduced in some countries show that "dramatically reducing the consumption of these disposable bags is easily achievable with coherent policy," Auken was quoted as saying in a Parliamentary statement.

Auken's report was approved on a first reading by 539 votes to 51, with 72 abstentions.

With a new parliament to be elected in May and a new EU leadership appointed later in the year, final approval and implementation of the plans is likely to be a very lengthy process.

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