

Shoppers favour plastic bags

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Malaysia's No Plastic Bag Saturday policy has had minimal effect on the amount of plastic waste going to landfills, according to new research.

The three-year study, led by Dr Victoria Little from Monash University Malaysia's School of Graduate and Professional Studies, concluded that plastic bag taxes and bans have not reduced the impact of plastic on the biosphere.

"While the No Plastic Bag Saturday policy has raised awareness of the environment, it has had a negligible effect on reducing [plastic bag](#) use," Dr Little said.

The research team, which included Professor Christina Lee, Head of the School of Business and Dr Sumesh Nair, a senior lecturer in the School, found the policy objectives of less [waste](#) to landfill and decreasing pollution were not achieved.

The research team observed shopping behaviours, talked to shoppers, retailers and not-for-profits, as well as consulted with waste management experts. They found that expatriates and locals had very different responses to the policy.

"We noticed that expats usually bring reusable bags and refuse plastic bags, while locals often resisted. Instead, they did their best to maximise their access to free plastic bags, Malaysian shoppers are strongly attached to their bags and perceive access to the bags as their right," Dr Little said.

Retailers reported that even obviously wealthy customers insisted on free bags and some reported increased thefts of trolleys and baskets by shoppers unwilling to pay 20sen for their bags.

It was also noted there were unintended side effects of the policy, longer queues on Sundays as shopper's avoided Saturdays, as well as negative perceptions of the Government's environmental record.

"The consumption patterns in modern societies are not sustainable. We extract raw materials, transform them into products, consume those products, and dispose of the waste in landfills," Dr Little said.

The team believe that following a five-step plan which includes controlling the types of plastic bags manufactured, more anti-litter campaigns, tougher penalties, convenient recycling facilities and a per kilogram payment for recycled bags, would help reduce the impact of plastic bags on the environment.

The steps acknowledge the high value consumers place on the bags, rather than targeting consumers. The issue of waste and misuse is addressed throughout the production, distribution, consumption and disposal system.

Provided by Monash University

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