

New Zealand bans single-use plastic bags

July 1 2019, by Neil Sands



Companies that break New Zealand's plastic bag ban will face heavy penalties

New Zealand officially banned single-use plastic shopping bags Monday, introducing hefty fines for businesses that continue to provide them.

Plastic pollution has become a growing global concern, with a million birds and more than 100,000 marine mammals injured or killed every

year by becoming entangled in packaging or ingesting it through the food chain.

Companies that break New Zealand's ban will face heavy penalties, including fines of up to NZ\$100,000 (\$67,000).

"New Zealanders are proud of our country's clean, green reputation and want to help ensure we live up to it," environment minister Eugenie Sage said.

"Ending the use of single-use plastic shopping bags helps do that."

Under the new rules, thin plastic single-use shopping bags can no longer be supplied—but the law allows reusable carriers to continue being provided.

The legislation—which was announced in August last year and came into force on Monday—will have little practical effect, as New Zealand's major supermarkets have already voluntarily banned the bags.

However, Sage said it was putting the issue of recycling on the agenda.

"(The ban) doesn't go far enough, but what is really great is it's started the conversation," she told Radio New Zealand.

"People are now talking about single-use plastics and how we can phase them out."



A million birds and more than 100,000 marine mammals worldwide are injured or killed every year by plastic packaging

Britain's Royal Statistical Society estimates 90.5 percent of all plastic waste—some 6,300 million metric tons—has never been recycled and is either in landfill or accumulating in the natural environment.

If current production and waste management trends continue, the ocean of plastic waste is estimated to almost double to 12,000 million metric tons by 2050.

More than 80 countries have already introduced bag bans similar to New Zealand's, according to the UN Environment Programme.

While it praised such initiatives, it said more needed to be done to minimise other sources of plastic waste including microbeads and single-use items such as straws.

Canada last month announced plans to ban disposable plastic items such as straws, cutlery and stir sticks from 2021.

The Pacific nation of Vanuatu will implement a ban in December on disposable diapers, which not only have non-biodegradable plastic linings but also use chemical absorbents which leach into the environment.

Sage said the New Zealand government was committing NZ\$40 million (\$27 million) to find ways to reuse plastic waste instead of sending it to landfill overseas.

"We have been sending our waste offshore for too long," she said.

"China and other countries refusing to take our waste is the wake-up call we need."

The issue of wealthy developed nations using poorer countries as trash dumps was highlighted this week when Canada had to accept back tonnes of rubbish it shipped to the Philippines years ago.

For years, China received the bulk of scrap plastic from around the world, but closed its doors to foreign refuse last year in an effort to clean up its environment.

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